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## A Modern Comedy of Errors.

By DARLEY DALE,

Author of "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH," "THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT," etc.

### CHAPTER XXXV.

#### PAUL'S COURSE OF ACTION.

PAUL DURSLEY was in a certain sense a domestic man ; he liked home life, he liked a woman at the head of his table ; he liked the society of women ; he liked all the little refinements which their presence brings with it. He was to a great extent dependent on them for all the small comforts of life ; he was quite incompetent to look after servants or a house, and suffered himself to be cheated rather than attend to such matters. He had always trusted to Dorothy, who was such an excellent house-keeper, to arrange all household details, and when he came to live alone in London he missed her terribly, and felt the need of a wife.

Sir Peter, too, was constantly urging on him the desirability of marrying, from a professional point of view ; so many people objected to an unmarried doctor, and now that Paul was getting on so well, it was really, so Sir Peter said, imperative that he should marry.

Paul agreed to all this ; he acknowledged he wanted a wife ; he confessed he should be far happier as well as far more comfortable, to say nothing of being far better off, married, but the difficulty was there was only one person in the world he had the slightest wish to marry, and that person was Chloe, who would have none of him. So he made the best of a bad job, and tried to be happy without her.

He did not succeed in being happy ; he was very busy, he delighted in his profession, he was winning renown, he was making money, but he was happier when living with Dorothy at Lyne-

ham, with just enough to live on comfortably, before he knew Chloe, than now. Not that he would have gone back to those days if he could; mere happiness is not everything; it is not even *the* thing that the wisest would choose; the happiest lives are not the richest in experience, or in what goes to make up life in contrast to existence.

Happiness is not the best hotbed for the development of character; unhappiness, trials, cares, sorrows bring forth finer fruit, but this is a fact only grasped in middle life; it is not in the creed of youth; experience only teaches it, and experience is a severe master.

Paul Dursley had learnt it, and he preferred to know and love Chloe hopelessly to the time when he did not know her and long for her; he preferred to sacrifice his happiness to save Sir Peter's reputation, to exposing his mistake to procure his own happiness; he felt the joy of sacrifice, and joy is better than happiness.

All the same, Paul was often very wretched; he was more cheerful when he heard Chloe was coming to England. So long as she was in Italy he had not the slightest hope of ever winning her, but when he heard she was coming to England, even though Bertha told him she did not wish to see him, his heart leaped up, and his view of life was brighter.

She would be nearer to him, there was something in that; it was on the cards that he might meet her some day. Fate might be kind and grant that day to come soon; there was a great deal in that; and when he heard Chloe was coming to England because she was tired of her career, tired of Italy, tired of life, there was still more in that.

Perhaps she was thinking of him. Paul was no coxcomb, but from what Bertha had told him, and Bertha was very frank with him about Chloe, he gathered that she had not quite forgotten him. So from the day he heard she had landed in England, he was, in spite of himself, a happier man; he went about his house whistling as he used to whistle at Lyneham; he bought some love songs, and when he dined at home would spend his evening at the piano practising them; he ordered some new clothes and took extra pains with his toilet; all which signs the sharp Fly noticed and set down to their right cause.

"The governor's going to have another shot at her, and if he don't bring her down this time 'twon't be my fault, for my mind



is 'made up ; if she chucks him over again, she'll have a letter from me, a letter without an ending. I ain't so green as to sign it. No, 'a well-wisher' will be about the size of it, and she'll learn whose fault or whose misfortune 'twas her father went off so sudden, and then we'll see if that don't make her ladyship sit up."

Fly's intentions, however, were, as we know, forestalled by Mrs. Crofton.

When a man is in love the whole world is to him but a shrine for the enthronement of his divinity ; the sun rises and sets only to gild her throne ; it shines but to shine on her ; all the flowers of earth bloom but to decorate her sanctuary, their fragrance is but incense to offer at her feet ; the birds sing only her praises ; the earth is only an altar on which he offers all the beauty he sees around to his idol. So a man in love is ever on the *qui vive* to discern every beautiful mood of nature, every lovely light, every exquisite tint of colour, every musical sound that greets his ear, to offer them each and all to his beloved.

He does not necessarily do this consciously ; it is the key, though, to the unwonted pleasure the most unobservant man derives when he is in love from the beauty of nature.

Paul was not conscious of the reason he now found such pleasure in gazing at the flower shops, why he went to Covent Garden for this purpose ; why, if he went to a concert, the music now seemed sweeter than he had ever heard ; why, when he read poetry, every line seemed instinct with new meanings.

He had heard of Chloe's sudden resolution to come to London, because, as we have seen, he was dining at Sir Peter's house when her telegram arrived, and he had come to the conclusion that Dorothy had something to do with Chloe's change of plan.

Was it possible that she had told her he was innocent of being the cause of Sir John's death ? He knew of nothing else that Dorothy could say which would change Chloe's mind, and yet he did not think Chloe would come up and accept Sir Peter's hospitality if she knew it was he who had made that fatal mistake.

But in arguing thus Paul failed to take two things into consideration. In the first place, it was two years and a half now since Sir John's death ; the wound was partly healed ; Chloe could not feel so acutely about the accident now as she did when it had just occurred. Some allowance must be made for the healing

powers of time. Then, again, to marry the man whom she believed to be the cause of her father's death, was a very different thing to merely staying in the house of the man who had really been to blame.

In point of fact, Chloe's delight at learning that Paul was innocent was so great, that she scarcely took in the fact that Peter was guilty. True, when she went upstairs with Dorothy to put on her hat and jacket before she went home, after learning the truth, she did ask her how Sir Peter came to be guilty of such a mistake ; and Dorothy had replied, it was the anniversary of his first wife's death, that he had been overworked, and Paul had noticed he did not seem well and that he was in a very absent mood.

"Still I confess it is very extraordinary. I am quite sure Peter would never believe it possible that he made such a mistake ; even if I showed him the prescription, which I have never destroyed. It only shows the cleverest of us are fallible, which is a commonplace that throws no light at all on what must remain a mystery. Though what puzzles me is, that doctors so very, very rarely do make mistakes ; chemists make twenty where doctors don't make one, and yet even their mistakes are happily rare," said Mrs. Crofton.

To all of which Chloe had assented, and whether it was inconsistent with her former conduct or not, she did not feel the same anger with Sir Peter that she had felt with Paul ; the lapse of time made her look more leniently on him. She remembered how unhappy he had looked that first day she ever saw him ; she knew now how hard it was to lose those we love ; she sympathized with him ; nay, in her joy at knowing Paul was innocent, she forgave him.

She remembered, too, how ready Peter had been to bear part of Paul's imprisonment ; she thought of the readiness with which both brothers had sacrificed themselves to each other, and she admired Peter only less than she admired Paul ; and no thought of vengeance on her brother-in-law entered her mind.

Paul of course knew nothing of all these workings of Chloe's mind ; he was not yet aware of the extent of the change in her feelings for him ; he only knew she had suddenly decided to come to London.

On the Tuesday morning when he came down to breakfast there was a pile of letters by his plate, on the top of which lay one

he recognized at once as written by Chloe. It had been placed on the top by Fly, who had read Chloe in the monogram which sealed it, and knowing his master's habit on operation days, he had put it in a conspicuous place, wishing to see if Mr. Dursley would make an exception to his rule in favour of it.

When Fly came in to receive his orders for the day, Chloe's letter had disappeared from the heap, which lay otherwise untouched; but his master, as usual on the days he had a big operation on hand, was in an excited mood, in very high spirits, and having given Fly instructions as to when he should want the dog-cart, he went upstairs to the piano and sang himself into a calm and collected frame of mind.

But the letter lay unopened in his breast pocket; he dared not break the seal; the life of the patient he was to operate on hung on the steadiness of his hand, the strength of his nerve, the coolness of his brain. If the letter contained good news, he would be so wild with joy he could not answer for the effect it might have on him; if it contained bad news it would depress him, and perhaps shake his confidence in himself, and that would be a bad look-out for the patient.

Better that he should endure suspense than run the risk of exciting himself unduly or depressing himself; he could while away the hours of suspense without any fear of its affecting his patient, while the excitement of the operation itself was a distraction.

Directly it was over, though, he would tear open the letter and learn his fate; the operation was not till twelve, but he was due at the hospital at half-past ten for a clinical lecture, and from that time he would not have much leisure to think of Chloe.

It was a quarter to one before Paul was at liberty to read the letter; then as he put on his coat again, he pulled it out of his pocket and broke the seal, and the next minute he was tearing out of the hospital, regardless of his professional friends, who were full of congratulations on the way in which he had performed the operation. He hailed a hansom and ordered the man to drive to Sir Peter's house, and he suffered agonies of fear lest Chloe should have left before he arrived.

Poor little thing! What suspense she must have suffered that morning! What a brute she must think him, for how should she know he had only just opened her letter? He confounded his luck again and again, and the worst of it was, he could not

go down to Bilney after her if she had left, for he could not leave his patient for more than a few hours at a time for the next day or two.

Then he remembered Sir Peter lunched at one, and he was engaged to dine with him that evening, so he hardly liked to drop in for luncheon if Chloe should be there still. It was twenty minutes' drive from the hospital to Sir Peter's house, and never before in his life did Paul suffer such torture. He was feeling the reaction from the strain of the operation; he was wanting food, and he was dying to see Chloe, and dreading to hear she had left.

At last he arrived, clashed the bell, and when Drummond answered it, demanded: "Is Miss Chloe Dane here?"

"Yes, sir; they have begun luncheon. Will you come in?"

"Thank God," was Paul's somewhat irrelevant answer as he pulled out a visiting card, scrawled something on the back and gave it to Drummond, who wondered if Mr. Dursley were taking leave of his senses, so excited was his manner.

"Give that to Miss Chloe, please, and say I'll be back at two o'clock; I won't come in now because I dine here to-night," and before Drummond had time to reply, Paul jumped into his hansom again and told the driver to take him to his own house, where he made a hasty luncheon, changed his clothes, and was back again at Sir Peter's house before two o'clock.

"Miss Chloe's alone in the drawing-room, sir," said Drummond, with an air which respectfully suggested that he knew Paul's business as well as he knew it himself, and hinted that it was partly due to him that she was so favourably situated.

The strains of Chloe's violin stirred Paul's blood as he followed Drummond upstairs.

"Mr. Dursley, for Miss Dane," said Drummond, throwing the door wide open, and taking as long as he conveniently could in shutting it.

All he saw was Chloe drop her bow in one hand and lower her violin with the other, then advance a few steps and execute an elaborate courtesy to Paul as he went towards her.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### CONTAINS A LOVE SCENE.

CHLOE never could remember how she whiled away the morning after her interview with Sir Peter till Paul entered the drawing-

room, and she stood in her white dress with a red rose in the front of it courtesying before him. As soon as her brother-in-law mentioned that Paul had an operation that day, she knew why she had not had an answer to her letter ; in fact she hoped Paul would not answer till the operation was over. She would respect him more if she felt he could for his patients' sake restrain himself from opening her note ; she would like to feel the man she loved had that power over himself.

"I could not have done it, not if the lives of all my relation ; hung on it, I am quite sure I could not," she thought, and as we usually admire most the virtues in which we know ourselves to be deficient, Chloe spent her morning in admiring Paul for his self-control.

As he had flown to the piano to calm his nerves, so Chloe flew to her faithful violin to while away that interminable morning, but at twelve o'clock Sir Peter seized a minute to run upstairs and put an end to her practice, which was in reality a hymn of praise to Paul.

"Does it worry you? I forgot you were just under me. I'll take it up to my own room," said Chloe.

"No, don't do that. It does not worry me in the least, but it exhausts you, and you are not strong enough just now to play for more than an hour at a time. You are under my care, you know, and you must do as I tell you, like the good, obedient little girl you are."

"You satirical thing ; you know I am as wicked as can be," said Chloe, throwing herself exhausted on to a sofa.

"Listen to me a minute, Chloe ; you are ill. I hope to cure you, but I can't unless you promise to do as I tell you ; if you don't it may go hard with you. It is really serious, and if anything happened to you I know some one who would never forgive me ; so do be a good child, will you?" and Sir Peter bent over Chloe, and took her little burning hands in his cool strong ones, and looked anxiously at the little excited face.

"You are a darling, Peter, but never you tell Bertha I said so. Yes, I'll be good if I can. Now what am I to do?"

"Drink a glass of wine Drummond is bringing you, and lie there till luncheon. You shall have Nona to amuse you," said Sir Peter, pressing the little brown hands and hurrying away.

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"Peter, when will that operation be over?"

"What operation? Paul's? Oh! he won't get back much before half-past one. They stop at the hospital talking about it for nearly an hour sometimes. But he dines here to-night, you know," said Sir Peter, wondering at her evident anxiety to see Paul.

Chloe sighed when he was gone as she reflected there was another two hours at least before she could hope to have an answer to her letter, and then she listened to Nona's prattle for a little while, but the child worried her, so she sent her away and tried to read a novel, until at last the gong sounded for luncheon. They had hardly begun luncheon when Paul's hansom dashed up, and Bertha remarked it was a very impatient patient, when Drummond came in with Paul's card on a tray for Chloe.

"The message is on the back, ma'am."

Chloe flushed crimson, and then grew very pale as she took the card and read:

"Only just opened letter. Will be with you at two o'clock."

"It was Mr. Dursley, Sir Peter; he would not come in because he dines here to-night," said Drummond in a confidential aside to his master.

And Sir Peter saw Chloe ate scarcely anything, and hoped for her sake that matters between her and Paul would soon be adjusted, for the girl was in a very delicate condition, and excitement of any kind was bad for her.

He forced her to eat something, and tried to get her to lie down till it was time for her to drive out with him, but Chloe was too excited to do anything but seize her violin and amuse herself with that till Paul was announced.

"Better late than never. So this is the way you treat an old friend just come back from Italy after two years' absence, is it?" said Chloe, picking herself up after her courtesy and laying her violin aside, then sinking into a low chair.

"You are ill," exclaimed Paul anxiously, drawing another chair close to her.

"Oh! it is nothing. It is only my heart flutters like a little bird if I move quickly. Peter has taken me in hand; he is to go into my case thoroughly by-and-by. I was so silly this morning, he could not do anything with me."

"Why? What did you do?"

"I howled and I wanted to go home to-day, and I should have gone; not even Peter would have kept me. Peter is very, very nice, you know. I am very fond of Peter, but I should have gone home all the same, only he happened to say you had an operation to-day."

"And that induced you to stay?"

"Yes, because Dorothy had told me you never opened any letters when you were going to operate till the operation was over. So then I decided to wait till to-morrow to see what your answer would be."

"Chloe! My own Chloe! As if my answer could be anything but this."

And he stooped and gathered the unresisting Chloe into his arms very gently, as if she were a delicate piece of porcelain he feared to break, and the little dear dark curly head sank on his shoulder, and he bent his handsome face, with his blue eyes and golden brown moustache, down to Chloe's pale face, and he felt a little brown hand go round his neck, and a silence more eloquent than words cleared up all the past, and each understood the other perfectly.

"I am so tired, Paul, darling," said Chloe presently, feeling that some common-place remark was the best vent for the excitement they were both feeling.

"My little angel," said Paul, leading her to a sofa and seating himself beside her, his arm round her slender waist.

"No, Paul, no; not an angel. Don't make any mistakes; there is nothing of the angelic nature about Chloe. Angels are strong and well and good; Chloe is weak and ill and wicked; and if you are not nice to her she'll die; angels don't die, you know. They live always. I should not like to be an angel unless—unless Paul was with me," and Chloe put one of Paul's hands to her mouth and pretended to bite it.

"Do you love me, Chloe?"

"No," said Chloe briefly, shaking her head.

"Chloe! I hoped, I thought, I dared to think you did love me, at least a little."

"No, Paul, I don't love you—a little."

"You do, you must. Say you love me just the least little bit," pleaded Paul, that handsome face of his peering intently at Chloe's and trying to read her heart.

"But I can't say it, because it wouldn't be true," said Chloe demurely.

"Not true to say you love me just a very little. Oh! my Chloe, surely I have not been deceiving myself all this weary two years."

"Well, if you have been flattering yourself that your Chloe loved you just a very little all this two years, the sooner she undeceives you the better," said Chloe, sitting suddenly bolt upright, but keeping one of Paul's hands in both hers.

"I did. I fear I was a conceited fool for my pains, but I humbly hoped you did," said Paul in a very despondent tone.

"Well, I shan't contradict your estimate of yourself. Oh, Paul, you goose; I don't love you a little; I love you terribly. There, don't look at me. I shall never say so much as that to you again as long as we both shall live," said Chloe, hiding her burning cheeks in Paul's waistcoat.

Paul had ordered his dog-cart to call for him at three o'clock to take him to the hospital to see how his patient was now the effects of the chloroform had gone off, so at three Drummond had to interrupt this *lê-le-à-lê-le*.

"I must go; I may be wanted at any moment for the next day or so, till this poor woman is out of danger. I'll be here if possible at seven this evening, and then we can have a little talk before dinner," he said, as he rose to go.

"Yes, mind you come early; we have heaps to say, and we have said nothing yet," said Chloe.

"And yet we have said everything; everything is said in three words: I love you," said Paul, lingering.

"Go to your patient, sir, and don't begin that story over again," said Chloe, running to the window to see what kind of vehicle he drove, and decided that if he wanted her to drive out with him in London he must get a victoria, since she dared not drive in a dog-cart in London streets.

Half-an-hour later Sir Peter came to look for her to take her for the promised drive, but Chloe was curled up on a sofa sound asleep.

"Poor child, she is worn out with excitement. I won't disturb her; I'll go to the club now and drive after tea. Don't let any one wake her," said Sir Peter to his wife, who had followed him into the room.

"What has happened, do you know?" said Bertha.

"No, but I can guess. All I know is Paul rushed into my room before he left and said, 'It is all right.' I said, 'What is all right, your patient?' and he emphatically negatived that idea and said, 'Chloe and me,' by which I conclude Chloe has changed her mind and decided to marry him."

"It is very odd. I don't understand it," said Lady Dursley.

"My dear, who does understand a woman? I frankly confess the longer I live the less I understand women."

"Chloe is very firm when once she takes an idea into her head. Something must have happened to make her change her mind," persisted Bertha.

"Oh, nonsense. Chloe is in love, and rather badly too. I am anxious about her, she wants a great deal of care. She is very much below par, and her heart is weak. We must look after her well," said Sir Peter, who never for one moment suspected that Chloe's sudden change of mind was due to anything beyond the idiosyncrasy of her sex.

Bertha was sure there must be a reason for her little sister's consenting to marry Paul, but happily for her own peace of mind she had not imagination enough to guess at anything like the real cause. She concluded Chloe's weak health had weakened her will, and hoped for Paul's sake she would not change her mind again as she grew stronger.

Chloe slept till five, when she woke, pretending to be very angry with Sir Peter for not having woke her in time for her drive.

"He is coming for you after tea, Chloe, dear. I am so glad at what he tells me. Paul says it is all right between you and him. I am so pleased," said Bertha.

"I am rather pleased. I feel as if Constance would never jar on me again," said Chloe.

"Do you mind telling me how it came right? You used to say it never could," said Bertha.

"I used to talk a great deal of nonsense about things I did not understand, and then the other day I took to listening to what some one who is older and wiser than I, Dorothy Crofton, had to say on the subject, and then I changed my mind; and now, Bertha, I shan't tell you any more. You don't tell me what you do when you have said or done anything wrong to Peter."

"I hope I never do or say anything wrong to him," said Bertha.

"But you do sometimes. I have heard you say things to Peter I shall never dream of saying to Paul; at least I hope he'd pitch into me well if I did. Peter spoils you; I don't mean Paul to spoil me. I should not love him if he did. I don't think he could do wrong in my eyes; all the wrong-doing in our house will be mine, but here all the wrong-doing seems to be Peter's."

"Chloe! surely you don't think I am master? I assure you it isn't so; he leaves all details to me to settle, but in everything of importance Peter is an autocrat and I don't think I wish it otherwise. I quite agree with you that the wife ought to be in submission to her husband."

"But I never said anything of the kind. Look here, Bertha, you appear to manage and control Peter, whereas in reality he manages and controls you, and everybody who comes in his way also. Well, now, my method will be the exact opposite to yours; I am going to appear to be ruled by Paul in all things great and small; but in reality Paul will do exactly as his Chloe likes, you'll see."

"So will you," laughed Bertha, with the advantage of two years' experience of married life on her side.

Here Sir Peter came in and stopped the conversation by taking Chloe off for a drive; on their return he took Chloe into his consulting-room and sounded her heart and prescribed for her, and decided to tell Paul that evening what course of treatment she was to undergo; so he waylaid his brother on his arrival for this purpose.

"There must be no talk of marriage for three months at least; then you may broach the subject if she is better, but not unless. She will get quite strong if she follows my advice."

"I think she will do that. You seem to have influence over her."

"There is another thing, London is not a good place for her; she wants country air. Crofton understands her; I should like her to go to them for six weeks; she will do Dorothy good, and the quiet life and bracing air are just what she wants."

"When do you wish her to go?" said Paul, divided by the desire to be near Chloe and the anxiety he felt on her behalf.

"Oh! in a week or two; the sooner the better really, particularly if we get any hot weather; but of course she will want to be near you for the present. Don't say anything about it till we hear



from Dorothy ; she won't mind so much if she goes there," said Sir Peter, who sympathized with Chloe's feelings with regard to her eldest sisters.

Somewhat to their surprise, when Chloe was told a few days later that Sir Peter wanted her to get out of London as soon as possible, and she had a pressing invitation from Dorothy, she made no objection to the plan, particularly when Paul promised to come down every week for Sunday. It was finally arranged that he should take her down one Saturday afternoon, about ten days after the renewal of their engagement.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## CHLOE CONQUERED.

A FEW days after Chloe went to London, the two elder Miss Danes were at breakfast, prayers were over, and they were free to open their letters.

"Here's one from Chloe for me, and one from Peter for you ; what can he be writing to you for, Augusta ?" said Constance.

"About Chloe," answered Augusta, with heightened colour, and a sigh of regret for the charming brother-in-law, who had preferred that relationship to one that would have pleased Augusta better.

Augusta was not a happy woman, and did not even pretend to a cheerfulness she did not feel, as she suspected Constance did. Constance's manner was intended to be a silent reproof to Augusta for her less contented spirit ; Augusta knew this and resented it. Poor woman, she was to be pitied, nature had not been generous to her in outward or inward gifts ; she had not talent enough to strike out a line of life for herself ; she only felt the incompleteness of spinsterhood, and had no eyes for the way-side flowers that strewed the lonely path she had to tread.

"Oh, it is such good news from Chloe ! Do guess, Augusta. I am sure you never will. I am surprised. How nice for all of us. It will give us so much to do and to think of for some time to come. There is nothing like occupation to chase away dulness, is there ?"

"To what are you alluding ? Peter's news is anything but good. He is anxious about Chloe's health, and she is to go to the Croftons almost immediately for six weeks, to be under Dr. Crofton's care. Her heart is very weak," said Augusta.

"That will get better now, we must hope. She is engaged to Mr. Dursley, and they are to be married this year. Isn't it capital news? Just fancy, two out of us four marrying. I am so glad ; it is so much nicer to belong to a marrying family," said Constance.

"I really don't see the advantage of it, unless you happen to be one of the married ones, which neither of us is," said Augusta.

"But now there will only be two old maids instead of four, as there might have been if the others had not married."

"Chloe could never have been an old maid."

"Perhaps not, but we could and are."

"I do hope, now she is going to be married, she will give up always dressing in white or black. I love colour ; and she really can't wear white in London, except quite in the summer."

"I feel much more anxious about her health than about the colour of her dresses. I shall be glad when she gets to Lyneham, that we may go and see her."

"Well, there is an end to her musical career now, that is another comfort. I am sure, Augusta, we have every reason to be most thankful. We never approved of her singing in public. Marriage is so much better. I am so glad Chloe has got over that morbid feeling she had about that unfortunate mistake of Mr. Dursley's."

"I can't understand that part of it. I shall ask Chloe what made her change her mind. I think Mrs. Crofton had a good deal to do with it," said Augusta.

"And then it is an exceptionally happy match ; two brothers marrying two sisters : what could be nicer?" said Constance, pursuing her cheerful course.

Augusta thought it would have been considerably nicer for her if one of the brothers, Peter to wit, had chosen her instead of Bertha, but she did not say so, and Constance proceeded to point out other advantages in the engagement, blissfully unconscious how trying her remarks were to her sister.

"It will be so charming for us to have two married sisters in London ; we shall be able to go up to London very often now. And I think, Augusta, we really are two very fortunate women, to have two such delightful brothers-in-law. Mr. Dursley seems likely to be almost as great a surgeon as Peter is a physician, and they are both so clever and so nice-looking. It ought to be the

greatest comfort to us to see our two sisters so very happily married, and so far as I am concerned I can truthfully say it is a very great source of joy to me to know that Chloe is going to follow Bertha's example, and leave us two to settle down into happy, contented, cheerful old maids."

Now every word that was not gall in this speech was wormwood to the unfortunate Augusta, but she restrained the unladylike longing she felt to box Constance's ears, and only showed her impatience by an unnecessary rattling of the cups and saucers which stood before her.

"We have so much to be thankful for," continued Constance, the defects of whose virtues were more conspicuous than the virtues themselves. "We shall have Chloe back for six months."

"Indeed we shall not. Peter wishes her to go to the Croftons for a month, and then I believe they are going to Cromer or Yarmouth for another month," interrupted Augusta.

"Then there will be all the excitement of her wedding. I love weddings," continued Constance.

Augusta sighed impatiently.

"And then you and I will be left alone, not in single but in double blessedness for the rest of our days, and I hope we shall go down to posterity as two really happy, cheerful old maids."

Then Augusta lost her temper, and for once in her life was startled out of her usual stilted language.

"For heaven's sake hold your tongue, Constance, and don't talk any more such confounded nonsense."

Constance could scarcely believe her ears. "Confounded!" Was it "confounded" or had she made a mistake? Was Augusta, the precise, dignified Augusta, really guilty of such a *lapsus linguæ*? Apparently, there was no mistake, for Augusta left the room abruptly, and removed any doubt in her sister's mind as to disturbed temper by slamming the door after her, as decidedly as any hasty-tempered housemaid might have done. But "confounded" was such a very strong expression. Chloe used it rather frequently, but from the stately Augusta's lips it was very astonishing, to say the least.

Surely she did not care for Mr. Dursley herself; was it possible she did? Why, she was a year older than he was, and Constance had never seen the slightest sign before of Augusta even admiring Paul. She could not understand it at all, and somehow it never

occurred to her that Peter was the object of Augusta's sneaking affection. But at last she grasped the fact that her conversation had been displeasing to her elder sister, and cheerfully resolved to try and find a more congenial topic the next time they met.

A week later Paul and Chloe went down to Lyneham together. It was a Saturday, and Paul meant to stay with her till Monday morning. Chloe was still in a condition which caused Sir Peter to look grave and her lover the greatest anxiety. The latter had rebelled at the separation, but Peter was most autocratic about it.

"She will be far better away from you just now ; it only excites her to see you ; moreover, London is not the place for her ; she wants absolute quiet. Let her go to Dorothy at once and spend a month there, and then they can both go to a quiet seaside place for another month. And I won't hear of your marrying till she is much better ; then we can talk about it," said Sir Peter.

"He is right, I know," said Paul to Chloe ; "but it is very hard to part so soon again."

"It is odious. If Peter weren't almost as nice as you I would not do it. Mind, I didn't say he was quite as nice as you ; but Peter is an angel."

"What am I, then ?"

"A man, Paul ; not even a pious one. Oh ! if you ever get pious and lecture me I'll elope with Peter, and vow I mistook him for you. Saints alive ! if my sisters could hear me," said Chloe, whose spirits were very high sometimes.

She did not talk much on the journey—talking tired her ; but she did say the sight of the green fields did her good and she thought the country air would be better for her than London.

They found Dorothy still grieving for her baby, but stronger ; and Crofton told Paul he thought looking after Chloe would do her good and take her out of her trouble ; though, undoubtedly, the loss of the child had saddened her life and was a grief she would never quite get over. Her laugh, which was music to her husband's ears, was rarely heard now, but Chloe evoked it before she had been long in the house.

"Who do you think was one of the first people to congratulate me, Dorothy ? Fly ! He called on purpose, and when he was admitted to my presence, stood at attention and said, 'Well, ma'am, all I can is *we* were going to rack and ruin ; professionally we should have succeeded, I daresay ; but the robbery as

goes on below stairs is past all belief, and only I know what master used to go through when you were in Italy.'"

Chloe imitated Fly's accent to a nicety, and Dorothy pealed out a laugh.

"Then he waxed oracular and confidential, and with an air of great mystery said, in a half-whisper, 'If Miss Dorothy hadn't ha' done it when you went over to Lyneham, I had made up my mind to tell you the truth myself,' by which I fear he guesses our secret. He can't possibly know it, can he?"

"God forbid! At any rate he can't prove it; no one can do that but I. He is so fond of Paul that he is quite capable of inventing any story to benefit him," said Mrs. Crofton.

"He concluded in the most dramatic style: 'You need not fear, ma'am; in our profession secrets are as safe as in the Catholic priests' keeping. I shall never breathe a word now my master has got his wish,' whereupon I tipped him, and he departed."

"Poor Fly! I miss him; so do all the servants; but I suppose he will never leave Paul," said Mrs. Crofton.

"Oh! never, I hope. Dorothy, I want you to do something for me, will you?" said Chloe suddenly.

"I would do anything for you, dear child. What is it?" said Dorothy, coaxing Chloe's dark curls.

"I want you to burn that prescription, the proof of Peter's mistake; will you? Paul wishes it as much as I do, and Peter has been so dear to me. I should like it destroyed."

"You shall burn it yourself; come with me and we will get it," said Mrs. Crofton; and a few minutes later Dr. Crofton found them both on their knees before an empty grate, watching the burning of a piece of paper.

"There; there dies the proof of Paul's generosity and Peter's one mistake," said Dorothy.

"There dies the only obstacle to my happiness," said Chloe, jumping up and clapping her hands. "Where's my violin? I must play a 'Te Deum.'"

"I wish it could share the fate of that piece of paper," said Dr. Crofton.

"Dr. Crofton! You blasphemous, murderous creature! How dare you say such a thing?" exclaimed Chloe, half in earnest at the very idea of burning her fiddle.

"I dare, because the violin is killing you ; if it could be kept out of your hands for six months there might be some chance of your getting well, but so long as you are tearing your heart to pieces with the excitement of playing as you play, no doctor can do much for you. However, I don't intend you to touch your violin while you are here," said Dr. Crofton, in the dictatorial tone he often assumed to his patients, a tone some liked and some resented.

Chloe looked at him in blank astonishment for one minute, and then with a scornful little laugh she said :

"Don't you, indeed? Well, just listen to me, Dr. Crofton. Peter has given me leave to practise one hour a day, and I am going to do it, and if you say another word about it I will make it two, there!"

Apparently Dr. Crofton had no intention of saying another word, for with a laugh as scornful as Chloe's he turned on his heel and left the room.

"Oh dear! I hope you two are not going to quarrel," said Dorothy.

"My dear, we shall probably fight if he has any more nonsense about my not practising."

"He won't let you if he says he won't ; I know what Michael is."

"Yes, but he does not know what Chloe is," said Chloe, running off to tell Paul that the prescription was burnt, and that she and Dr. Crofton had already quarrelled.

The next time they met they were apparently on the best of terms, but Chloe told Paul it was only an "armed peace." She was in an excited state all the time Paul was there, and after he left she felt the reaction, and spent the next few days on the sofa in the garden, only getting up for her hour's practice.

Augusta and Constance drove over to luncheon one day, and Augusta was alarmed at Chloe's condition, but Constance pointed out the duty of looking on the bright side, and of hoping for the best and trusting that all would be well.

"You may look on the bright side and hope for the best, but I assure you Chloe won't be well unless she consents to do absolutely as she is advised, and above all to give up her violin until she is stronger," said Dr. Crofton.

"Shall we speak to her about it before we go?" said Augusta.

"As you like ; I fear it will do no good. I would lock her



fiddle up, only the excitement it would cause would be even worse for her than the practising," said Crofton.

"We'll see what we can do," said Constance hopefully, as she and Augusta moved across the lawn to Chloe's sofa.

Crofton watched their tall figures, with the neat plaits of sandy hair under their hats, as they walked to the cedar under which Chloe was lying; he was too far off to hear what was said, but at the end of five minutes he saw the stately sisters rise and beat a hasty retreat, and he rightly guessed Chloe had used some unparliamentary language.

"She will not be advised," said Augusta.

"Perhaps Mrs. Crofton can persuade her to give in; she seems to have great influence over Chloe," said Constance.

"No; Dorothy cannot; Dursley himself failed, but Sir Peter thought an hour a day would not hurt her. I differ, because I see how it exhausts her. However, I will make another effort to-morrow, and I will let you know the result, Miss Dane. It will be serious if I fail, for she is in a critical state," said Crofton.

The next morning, when Chloe came down at about eleven o'clock, to her surprise Dr. Crofton was in the drawing-room.

"Aren't you going to see your patients?" she asked.

"Presently; you are the patient I wish to see first. You look very white this morning; let me listen to your heart," said Crofton, adjusting his stethoscope.

"Thanks! Now, what time will you be ready to go home to-day? Will five o'clock suit you? It will be cool then, and I can drive you," said Crofton gravely.

"Home! I am not going home. Dorothy invited me for six weeks; I have only been here a week yet," said Chloe.

"Yes, we hoped you would get better; you are not so well, and I may as well tell you I don't intend you to commit suicide in my house. I can imagine nothing worse for you in your present state than exciting yourself, as you do daily with your violin. No power of persuasion will stop you, and if I were to use force and take away your fiddle, that might do you even more harm, for you would probably fly into a passion. I therefore adopt the only course open to me: I decline any further responsibility in the case, and sorry as I am to appear so inhospitable, I must ask you to be ready at five to-day, for me to take you to Bilney."

"Is this a grim and ghastly joke?" said Chloe, not sure if he were in earnest or not.

"On the contrary; I never was more in earnest. I am awfully sorry for Paul, poor old fellow, it is very hard lines on him. At five o'clock, then," and without waiting for Chloe's answer Crofton left the room, and a minute later she heard him drive out of the yard.

Presently in rushed Mrs. Crofton.

"My dear Chloe! What does it mean? Michael has told me to have all your things packed, and he says you are going home at five to-day. Why is this?"

Chloe explained why it was, and Dorothy burst into tears.

"Don't cry, Dorothy; I am not going," said Chloe, caressing her friend.

"But he will make you go," sobbed Dorothy.

"No, he won't. Wait till he comes back and you'll see. Don't pack up yet," said Chloe, but more was not to be got out of her.

She spent the morning writing to Paul and rummaging in Dorothy's room for some crape and a black lace shawl, but she would not tell Mrs. Crofton what she wanted them for. At one o'clock Dr. Crofton returned, and was writing in the surgery, when the strains of Chloe's violin reached his ear.

"Umph! Little vixen, she has won after all. Well, she must go her own way to the grave; I wash my hands of her," he muttered.

The sound of the violin drew nearer, and now he distinguished Chopin's funeral march, and was perforce obliged to listen. Nearer and nearer it came, and then paused for a moment outside the surgery door, and three mysterious taps were sounded on it. Crofton sprang up and opened it, and Chloe, veiled from head to foot, her face uncovered and her arms free, walked in playing the last bars of the funeral march on her beloved fiddle, which was adorned with a crape bow. Crofton stood frowning before her when suddenly Chloe ceased playing, laid the bow across the violin, and handed them both to him.

"I surrender," she said, smiling as Chloe well knew how at him.

Crofton's face changed immediately; he was delighted at having conquered, and he showed it.

"Thank you. I can't tell you how glad I am. If you don't get well now it will not be your fault."

"I want to get well," said Chloe piteously, "for Paul's sake," she added with tears in her great eyes.

"I think you will, if you will only rest and take things easy," said Crofton, as he laid down the violin, and taking Chloe's hands in his kissed them one after the other.

"You need not pack up my things, Dorothy; Michael has my violin and I am going to stay. Peace is declared," said Chloe, a few minutes later, to Mrs. Crofton.

"On what terms?" said Dorothy.

"He is to keep my violin as long as I am here, and I am only to play it when he lends it me. Really I am glad, it does exhaust me, only I hated giving it up; but I did not want to go home at all," said Chloe wearily.

She was more ill than she was aware of, and as the doctors knew, it would be a long while before she was well; nervous exhaustion, from which she was also suffering, is not cured in a day, and for some time after the violin was laid aside she seemed to make no progress. Then she and Dorothy went to the seaside together without the violin, and at the end of a fortnight there was a marked improvement in Chloe's health. Bertha and the children joined them a week later, and Peter and Paul took to running down, alternately, for a few days at a time, and Crofton drove over for a night whenever he could get away, and was delighted with the progress his little patient was making, but somehow he always forgot to bring the violin with him.

They stayed two months at the seaside and then Sir Peter fetched his family home, and Paul went with Chloe to Bilney for a week, where the wedding was fixed to take place at the end of October, by which time Chloe, it was hoped, would be quite strong again. This arrangement gave her six weeks to be at home, and she made Paul promise to come down at least two or three times before he came to take her away.

"You'll be good to your Chloe, Paul, when she is your wife, won't you?" said Chloe one day as they sat together in the hall, the pumas and jaguars alone witnesses of their attitude.

"Can you doubt it, my darling one?"

"No, I suppose I should not marry you if I did. But I suppose we shall grow cold like other lovers," said Chloe.

Paul, of course, vowed with all due masculine fervour that this was impossible.

"Well, if we do, you have your profession and I have my violin to fall back upon, so it won't matter so much," said Chloe.

"I thought Crofton had your violin."

"So he has. He is coming to-day, and if he does not bring it you shall challenge him, Paul. We will have a duel in the hall here. Arms, those two old pistols; let us get them down and clean them all ready; he will be here soon."

And when Dr. Crofton arrived a little later with Chloe's violin case in one hand, he found her and Paul polishing a pair of pistols, of whose intended use Chloe carefully informed him.

She seized her violin directly and began to play fitfully, at first declaring she had lost her power; then she warmed to her work, and, as the two men sat entranced, Chloe, in her white dress, some scarlet geraniums at her waist, the only patch of colour about her, stood like some fairy charming their ears.

Now the violin seemed to weep and wail, now to shriek with joy, then fell from it a monotonous cadence to be followed by a burst of harmony. Then a sad plaintive air inexpressibly sweet rent the air, and then such a triumphant symphony of praise that the eyes of both men were filled with tears, and then Chloe burst into the wedding march and, signing to them to follow, marched into the drawing-room.

"What very cheerful music, Chloe. What is it?" said Constance.

"A little thing they play in church sometimes at a very popular service," said Chloe.

"All services ought to be popular," said Constance.

"What about funerals?" said Crofton.

"There is a bright side even to them," said the irrepressible Constance.

"And a dark side to weddings, Dursley. Don't you flatter yourself it is all plums for the husband; you take my word for it, it is nothing of the kind," said Crofton.

"So Peter tells me, but I don't believe either of you," said Paul.

"Be quiet all of you, and listen to my fiddle, that knows best what our life will be," said Chloe.

And the violin told the rest of the story.

THE END.

## **"Nerve Strain."**

By JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

ONE is in the habit of hearing now-a-days all sorts and conditions of suffering set down at the door of nerves, quite as though they are the peculiar product of these latter days. I believe, however, that nerves in this country have always been more or less rampant, and that our ancestresses of the time long gone by suffered from nerves—or, as they called them, the "vapours"—in very much the same way as we do to-day. And although certain croakers are fond of telling us that we live at too high pressure, that we live our lives too fast, that we cram in too much into our every-day existence, and that it is to these modern vices that we owe our suffering, yet I feel certain that in the case of women the greater part of what we call nerve strain is not caused by any modern system of life, not caused by any of the wonderful advancements which have taken place in civilization, but by those same old troubles which have been part of the lot of women from time immemorial—the troubles which may be avoided if those about us would exercise a small amount of self-restraint and consideration.

The croakers are fond of telling us about the ravages which railway trains have made in the constitutions of those who use them; but I for one do not believe for a moment in the ordinary traveller finding any appreciable difference between going in a railway train and going in the old stage coach—in the matter of nerve strain, that is. Quite the contrary, indeed. True, a woman went then a long journey once in a lifetime—twice at most. If she lived in the remote provinces it took her a week or ten days to get to London, and I fancy her nerves must have been pretty well upset by the time she found herself in the bustle of the great metropolis. But who gets upset now a-days by four or five hours in an express train? Only a person of such a constitution that she should spend the main part of her life in bed. I don't doubt that if a delicate woman was to take up her abode in a railway train and pass the rest of her life on wheels—eating, sleeping,

riding and working all to the jar and fret of this system of locomotion—I don't doubt that that person after a certain time might become thoroughly nerve-broken, just as she certainly would be if confined for life in a coach ; but for the ordinary traveller who uses the Underground now and again, who is sufficiently well off to go to the Riviera in the winter, to take a little jaunt to Brighton or Westgate at Easter, who takes her children to the seaside for August, and pays half a dozen country house visits herself later on, I don't believe that the harm done by railway travelling is half as great as the distinct benefit which she gains from the change of air and scene that such travelling gives her. I don't believe that the modern hansom cab or little single brougham with their india-rubber tyres are half as jarring to the nerves as the old family chariot with its sickening see-saw movements or its more modern cee springs.

But there are nerve strains which have nothing to do with civilization, which civilization does not help, which modern improvements do not tend to modify, and those nerve strains are just as great to-day as they were in the time of our ancestresses who were troubled with "vapours." For instance, there is the anxiety of one's children. An ordinary woman whose child is ill—dangerously ill—cannot get the same sound and unbroken rest as she could if she knew that child was safely and soundly asleep simply recouping its strength to meet the exigencies of another day. One hears that there are women who are strangers to their own children. One hears that there are women in Society who "haven't time" to see their youngsters more than once a week or so. Personally I have never known any such mothers, but I do know a large number of women of every class whose anxiety in times of domestic illness is so great that they cannot long hold up under the strain. This of course is a natural nerve strain, it is a nerve strain which comes into the lives of most of us at some time or other, and is not to be confounded with any form of the "vapours."

The nerve strain which we cannot help is very bad to bear, but the nerve strain which we might help—or which others might help our feeling—is the hardest which can fall to the lot of any ordinary woman. Perhaps the commonest cause of nerve strain is the ever-present friend or relation who tells us what we



would rather not hear. There is, for instance, that inmate of one's house who always suspects one's servants of evil deeds such as have never entered into those servants' heads: Then there is the candid relation who tells you that she feels it her duty to let you know what is going on behind your back. At all times it is a very doubtful kindness to enlighten any one in this particular way. In the case of neglect or ill-usage of one's children during one's temporary absence, it is of course another matter—but it is surprising how seldom one's friends or one's relations think it necessary to interfere with one's nursery arrangements. No, but if they can explain to you how your spouse is carrying on a little affair with So-and-So, what nuts that is to them! We all know the true friend who cannot rest in her bed because she feels that your cook has a young man to see her occasionally, or who thinks you ought to know that Mrs. de John Brown has been saying the most horrid things about you, and that your coachman took his young woman for a drive in your carriage during the few days that you were spending with your sister last month. They all mean so well by you, these true friends! You would much rather not know that your cook has a young man; your cook's young man does not trouble you, you had a young man yourself once and you think that on the whole you would rather have a smart young cook with a young man than you would have a clever old cook who gets drunk. You have tried a series of clever old cooks who got drunk, and you find the young man much the lesser of the two evils. Your drunken and elderly cook may set your house on fire and is not to be relied upon if you have a few friends to dinner; but you know that your young cook's young man will not set your house on fire, neither will he tend to spoil the dinner—rather the reverse, as he likes something tasty and well-cooked just as much as you and your guests do.

You are not at all surprised to hear that Mrs. de John Brown says horrid things about you; she says horrid things about everybody, and as she says them about other people your common-sense tells you that she will say them of you if it suits her purpose, or the inclination of the moment; but you would rather not know it if she does. She is very smart, she gives lovely dinners, she always calls you "*dear lady!*" and makes a great fuss about you, and on the whole, you had rather not know that

she had ever uttered or thought a single word in your disparagement.

As for your coachman and the use he makes of your horse and carriage, there really is nothing in that. No woman in the world would grudge a good coachman a few hours' outing in that particular way; besides, he asked your permission on this special occasion and you gave it freely and ungrudgingly.

But it is the accumulation of such minor blisters which all tend in a busy woman's life to make up such an amount of nerve strain that it culminates in break-down. I think there is no doubt that the woman who is head of a household is more liable to suffer from this particular kind of nerve strain than any other. She may be a poor sort of house-mistress, but of necessity a great deal is deferred to her, and she must decide all manner of questions which can only be properly decided by her. Certain is it that the mistress of a household who is troubled with extraneous members of a family, suffers more intensely than any other. The woman who has a mother, or mother-in-law, a sister or brother, or a rich elderly aunt who must be kept in good temper and smoothed down in view of possible future contingencies, can seldom have complete freedom from nerve strain. A parent who has once been master or mistress of a house is bad enough; but the aunt with money—she is an affliction! And she is frequently also a snare and a delusion.

I heard of such an aunt the other day who spent her time visiting among her married nephews and nieces. She particularly fancied the young wife of one of her nephews; she made his house her head-quarters for several years. The little wife, who was young and rather inexperienced, felt she must bear anything and everything for dear Bob's sake. They had to give up everything that made life precious to them; because of Aunt Mary the husband gave up smoking indoors, the wife gave up having an at-home day, they gave up every conceivable joy for the sake of that old lady, and she eventually died in their house, giving them all the trouble of an illness and funeral—and she left every penny of her money among the others. It will probably be years before that little wife recovers from the strain of enduring Aunt Mary's favouritism, and at present the chief thanksgiving of her life is that it did not go on for an indefinite period.

With so many poor women their small blisters seem self-

renewing, so much so that to those who are only onlookers it is evident that when release comes the nerves of the poor victim will be beyond power of recuperation, that is to say, when the time of peace arrives they will be beyond the power of enjoying it. If only those who are thus blistering their unfortunate friends and relatives would try to look at the other side, would try to exercise some self-restraint, how much nerve strain might be avoided, how much jar and fret might be done away with! But, alas! I am afraid when that particular kind of nerve strain is unknown we shall all have reached that land where jar and fret have no place.

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## Chisai's Curio.

By WILLIAM TURVILLE.

"CONFOUND it!" (only he used a much stronger word). "No!" declared Kingsley, "I won't have the child's head shaved."

"*Narahodo!*" (Wonderful!), exclaimed his mother. "Don't be angry, great master. *Eiyah!* then he will be a little *tojin*" (foreigner). O Hana san looked as if she had received a new idea, and was not displeased with it. According to all tradition the child's head ought to be shaved, but the Japanese can throw off tradition as easily as they do their clothes; and besides these wilful foreigners had a way of their own, and when Kingsley put his foot down she knew it was no use arguing or coaxing with cringing *dodzos* (if you please), as some girls might have done.

"*Eurishi, eurishi*" (All right, all right), "Kingsley san. *Dai job!* (Good!) So it shall be then!" And she stroked her little boy's head, and looked from him to his father, as if wondering whether that little mite could ever grow to such thews and sinews and bearded manliness as the tall Cornishman who stood before her.

"Shagpat shall *not* be shaved," he said more gently.

"Shag—Shag—Shagpat! *Iye, iye!*" (No, no!) "Kinshan! Chisai Kinshan! Little Kinshan! "Oh, Shagpot, *iye!*" Kingsley laughed at her perturbation and flung himself on the mats.

O Hana took up Kinshan and gave him to his father. Then she clapped her hands, when an answering "*hegh*," was heard through the sliding paper-lined panels which formed one side of the room, and presently a little girl appeared bearing a lacquered tray on which was a tiny teapot, two tinier cups, a little cup-mat, and some fragile-looking biscuits. O Hana took it from her, placed it on a little low stand, put a cup on the cup-mat, and filled it from the teapot. Then, taking it to her lord, she presented it crouching, with a "*hegh*." That cup of tea and the little obeisance which accompanied it; the serious insistence with which that beggarly refreshment was invariably proffered, always made him laugh—laugh and drink. O Hana was getting to know all his ways, yet he was a little surprised at her sudden obedience. When he consulted her, as he often did, on a variety

of subjects, generally very much on the principle with which a man spins a coin in the air to decide his course of action in a matter where he has no predilection either way, she was generally very quick in making her choice, and he supposed that her philosophy over the head-shaving was an equally rapid process. Rapid and shallow, he thought; that was what these children of the Land of the Rising Sun were; even their characters were in miniature, like their hills and rivers, their insignificant hut-like houses, and their toyish pipes exhausted in three whiffs. Yet he was forced to admit that, in her behaviour towards himself, O Hana had shown a tenacity which did not coincide with this view. She was just as eager now to learn his wishes, and as ready to obey his commands as when she first entered his house. It was his opinion "Chisai," as he called her because she was so ridiculously small, looked for in all matters, and she would have changed her gods as often as her *obi* (belt), if he had so wished it. He had forbidden her to blacken her teeth on her marriage, after the custom of the country, and she obeyed him though she thought it very extraordinary, and when he wanted her to dress her hair in the European style she was quite willing and asked how it was done, and Kingsley got an amah who had been in service at Yokohama to show her. All the little ornamented pins and wonderful gewgaws and baubles of which she kept stock were approved by him before they were admitted to her toilet. She was for ever consulting him on these little matters of taste, and his word was law with her; and when his opinion changed hers changed also. She was always ready to give up her chatter with her fellow countrymen and countrywomen to attend to what he said, and as Kingsley's mastery of native idiom was by no means large, it must have been a perpetual worry to her to guide her ever-bubbling vivacity in the forced channels of the hybrid language in which they mostly conversed; a language which she was constantly expanding by the acquisition of new English words, while he, out of laziness, fell back upon English more and more as she advanced.

And Kingsley, who was a jealous dog of a man, thought sometimes that that readiness to change indicated a fickle nature, and then at other times it charmed him unspeakably, and he would call her nothing but Chisai all day. He was a man of wayward, fitful temper, with gloomy silent depths in his mind, rarely

stirred, but occasionally giving a hue of mysterious far-offness to his motives. Out of those depths came eruptions of feeling, hot muddy geysers of emotion, which filled O Hana with a strange thrill, half fear and half admiration. Then he would hardly look at her, and swore in abrupt peals of thunder until his mood came round again, and the house would echo with his laughter as it had done with his oaths, while O Hana's eyes dilated with wonder at the convulsions of that man-mountain, who was yet always gentle to her. But these outbursts were rare, and his sternest behaviour towards herself was a frowning glance with an impatient wave of the hand when her chatter distracted him, as occasionally it did.

And often as now he would sink into fits of brooding, when his brow was clouded and his looks inscrutable, and his expression of reverie as rapt as that of the great image of Buddha in his cell at Kamakura. Kingsley's thoughts, now in flying retrospect, ran over his life since he came to Japan.

He was living in a Japanese house at Yedo, that vast village of wooden huts and aggressively painful imitations of European architecture; of old trees and quaintly carved temples and gateways; of fanciful miniature landscape gardens, and oases of wild ancient park, teeming with a busy picturesque humanity, whose morals were as loose as their garments. He held a well-paid appointment connected with sericulture; an appointment which the Japanese Government in a moment of hot enthusiasm had created, and Kingsley had signed an engagement for six years.

In about a year after his arrival the enthusiasm of his patrons had died out; his duties became almost a sinecure, and the officials to whom he applied seemed rather pleased than otherwise whenever he asked for a holiday, so Kingsley used to try and please them in that way as often as he could, and spent his spare time in accumulating curios. Once he had ventured to state his opinion of the export of silkworms' eggs; he said it was suicidal, but for what seemed to him occult reasons, resting as he surmised on some socio-political basis he could not understand, this was received with disfavour, and as Kingsley felt certain his appointment would not be renewed his interest in the matter ceased, and he became wholly occupied with curios—and O Hana.

He had met her in his first little excursion into the country at



a tea-house at Oyiso, a village on the Tokaido or main road of Japan ; he had just come from Yedo, and she, with her mother and father, were returning thither, as he learnt from the latter. They arrived one morning as Kingsley was sitting at the open entrance smoking his after-breakfast cheroot, preparatory to starting. No sooner had they dismounted from their *kagos* (native travelling chairs) than O Hana was bustling about, waiting on her parents and chattering away like a magpie the whole time. She criticized the tea and the peach-water, and all the fiddle-faddling little things which were brought them, chaffed the tea-house girls, and had a word for the coolies who were swabbing their nine-tenth naked bodies before partaking of their simple fare ; suggested that they should cast lots again before starting as to who should carry her, she being the lightest weight, and as with many *arriatos* (thank yous) they appreciated her condescension, the merry picture of it all in the bright May morning and her laughter and gentle bustle made such an impression on Kingsley that his cheroot went out.

When they had settled down a little he made an excuse of this for begging a light at the *hibachi* (little charcoal stove), which stood between the father and mother. Kingsley addressed the former in his own very ordinary Japanese, and was astonished at receiving a reply in equally extraordinary English. As he smiled involuntarily he caught O Hana's glance, and saw that she appreciated the situation, and as her father, like most Japanese, was not averse to talking, he soon felt quite at home with them.

He learnt that he was a physician ; one of the old school, who, without having received a training in Western medical science, had picked up some smatterings of it, and was, moreover, bitten with a crazy thirst for a knowledge of the marvellous secrets pertaining to other matters which he deemed all foreigners more or less possessed. O Hana became silent, and her mother contributed little to the conversation beyond an acknowledgment of the civil observations of courtesy which Kingsley failed not to pay her. He took good care to deepen the favourable impression he had made ; obtained the doctor's address in Yedo, and received a cordial response to the suggestion that they should renew their acquaintance there.

Then with many indrawn "*heghs*" and bowings they parted. The doctor shook hands, proud of his Western accomplishment,

and when Kingsley waved his hand in adieu and said *Sayonara* (good-bye) to O Hana, her *Sayonara* in reply, soft and merry, lingered in his ears for many a mile as he continued his way along the dusty Tokaido.

In the first novelty of his surroundings Kingsley had not grasped every opportunity of cultivating the European acquaintances who were accessible to him. The handful of foreigners who were scattered about here and there in Yedo were too few to come across every day ; several were Germans, one or two Americans, and the all-pervading native life made them seem but as drops in the ocean. And into that he gradually drifted until it ended in Chisai.

As Kingsley sipped his tea these reminiscences of the past came over him, brought back vividly all at once by his suddenly finding himself legislating on the ridiculous question of his little boy's head-shaving. Away went his thoughts—to the visit he had made to the doctor's—how he did not see his daughter, but talked about her—how her father had told him that Prince Kusatzu had cast eyes on her ; Prince Kusatzu, whose treatment of his wife and concubines, as Kingsley afterwards learnt, was as notorious as such trifling domestic concerns can become in the lightly-bitted mouths of the Japanese—and how, though the prince's fancy was past and gone, it had evidently left a proud memory in her father's mind.

Kingsley had listened attentively, and made an excuse to come again soon. On that occasion and many others he did see O Hana, chatted with her to the utmost extent of his vocabulary, and gradually discovered her curious little museum of English words and phrases, bought her presents, and finally got what he wanted, and was not less astonished at O Hana's apparent happy-go-luckiness in the matter than at her father's acquiescence.

They were married ; not exactly in a Christian way, but with much feasting and many libations to the Japanese deities by their proxies the mortals over whom they presided, especially the doctor and his wife. The elaborate ceremony, so seasoned with quaintness that it never became wearisome, amused Kingsley, and O Hana's furtive looks of admiration as she now and then lifted her eyes to his manly figure, had an indescribable piquancy, and her merry inquisitive ways had lost none of their attraction for him.

His reverie was not long; O Hana had filled her own cup and squatted beside him, and had barely finished it when Kingsley's musing mood was over.

"What's that trash?" he exclaimed, looking at the biscuits.

"Trash! *Nani wa?*" returned O Hana. She was quite linguist enough to have said, 'What does that mean?' but in moments of whetted curiosity usually lapsed into her native tongue, and was always very pertinacious when she wanted to know the meaning of a new English word. She was all attention, and kept repeating her inquiry. Again Kingsley felt tickled, as he perpetually was, by the childish eagerness of O Hana about everything new, especially when it pertained to that foreign life to which she was linked, and to which she made him feel she wished to bind herself more closely every day.

So he had to stumble through a definition of some sort, and "trash" was in O Hana's mouth for the rest of the day. When the time for her siesta came, and Kingsley handed her her Japanese pillow, she waved it away, exclaiming, "Trash!" with magnificent emphasis. She seemed to think it an exquisite oath or expletive of some kind, perhaps because Kingsley was so fond of swearing himself, and she trashed everything that went wrong until nightfall, and then fell asleep suddenly, just after a little slap at Kingsley with "Trash!" on her tongue.

When O Hana learnt that he was a curio hunter she became his enthusiastic assistant. She was a very shrewd bargainer, and would spend any amount of time and trouble to get things at a low price for her master, whose taste she quickly read. Most things he only bought to sell again at his leisure, content to keep them if he could not get his price if they belonged to the flowery era of Japanese art, knowing that their value increased every year. But some he got as possessions, and of these the lacquered things, dark red ones especially, were his favourites, and he had often expatiated on their beauty to O Hana. There was something about an elaborately lacquered bas-relief which charmed him greatly; cloisonné ware he liked, but thought too dazzling, inlaid woodwork he counted frivolous, china seldom pleased him, bronzes were attractive, but too grotesque in pattern generally, and so were ivories, but the sombre polish of dark red lacquer fretted into leaves and flowers, and its homeliness, brightened by the worn yet polished look of age, took his fancy amazingly.

There was something about it akin to the deep-lying gloom in his own character, a shadow hugging sunbeams, in the light and shade of its pattern and the warm dark blush of its colour, and it seemed to him to furnish a room in a way no other things did.

Perhaps O Hana divined this, for she was for ever dwelling with speculative wonder on the ways of the colossal being, as she considered him, who shared her life so nonchalantly. His praise of the works of art which her countrymen produced, and which she herself sincerely admired with that perception of far-fetched fanciful resemblances and appreciation of recondite grotesqueness which enter into the native ideal of artistic merit, seemed a common bond between them; something in which on almost equal terms, like laughter or games of play, she could share with him. And she hankered sometimes after a more intimate participation in the thoughts of one whose musing moods were not less marvellous to her than the vastness of his physical proportions.

Kingsley, when he first came to the country, felt almost like Gulliver in Lilliput, and soon got accustomed to the very audible remarks on his stature which were bandied about amongst the natives wherever he went, and found that his unusual size had its advantages. When he was angry he looked as black as thunder, and as his language corresponded, his servants on those occasions scuttled about like rabbits.

The disparity between their proportions and his own forbade his touching those pigmies in anger, and as he restrained his limbs he unloosed his tongue. He made a special study of native oaths and words of minatory or abusive import, and their most maledictory intonations—regretting only that he could find so few—with a diligence he bestowed on no other branch of the language, and an appreciative zest of the result culminating in a proficiency which quite startled his hearers on several occasions. He used to threaten the offenders with a variety of Japanese tortures, of which he had learnt the names, in a way which elevated their respect to the verge of veneration.

When he mused longer than usual, O Hana would call him Daibutzu san, and apologize for interrupting his celestial meditations. For the doctrine of Confucius, that a wife should absolutely obey her husband, seemed more than justified by nature herself in Kingsley's commanding stature, slightly rugged yet

handsome face, and dignified bearing. His broodings seemed to her communings with a more intelligible Nirvana than that of the loosely transmitted Buddhism of her native traditions, warped as it was by the atrociously crooked ideas of her father, whose mind was a grotesquely complacent jumble of Oriental superstition and Japanese humour, smattered with half-understood glimpses of Western civilization.

He looked in on his daughter on the following day, accompanied by a friend, and when Kingsley returned O Hana was full of an account the latter, who, she said, was a wonderful man and a great traveller, had given of tunny fishing with a rod and line in the deeper waters of the coast some distance from the shore.

"You like go see too?" she exclaimed. "At Inoshima! Oh, it is a great thing. The tunny ran nearly half a *ri* (Japanese mile) before they caught it."

"By Jove, yes, I will. It must be splendid sport." Then "sport" had to be explained to O Hana, and she sported with it.

"I tell you what," said Kingsley. "That just fits in. What do you think? I've got leave for ten days next week. We'll go to Inoshima."

"*Oi, oiya!* You have got leave? *Ichiban!*" (First rate!) "Oh, but I want to go to Hakone. Better fish at Hakone!" she cried, and her eyes sparkled.

"Better fish! Why, I don't believe there are any in that lake."

"Perhaps not in the lake. I know!"

"What do you know?"

"Oh, I know, and by-and-bye you know too."

"We will go to Inoshima; I will go fishing, and you shall show Kinshan the sands, and buy him some of the pretty little toys they sell there, made of shells and coral and seaweed."

"Ah no, ah no!" she cried entreatingly. Kingsley was surprised, and a cloudy meditative humour came over him at O Hana's puzzling caprice. Why on earth did she want to go to Hakone all at once? He couldn't make it out. However, he was a good-natured man, and presently gave up his own idea as he saw how eager she was, remembering that never before had she insisted on her own way as she was doing now. When he intimated his intention, O Hana laughed.

"*Oi oiya!* You will be glad, I can tell you."

"*Eurishi*. All serene." For though Kingsley spoke as little Japanese as he could, no one after a day or two in Japan can escape using that universal "right all right" of its merry chatters occasionally.

When the day for their trip to Hakone came, they started early in the morning in *ginrickshas*, and put up for their first stage at Oyiso. As they went through that village Kingsley, who was scrutinizing the tea-houses as they went along to select the best one, heard a sudden exclamation from O Hana, who was behind him, as her *ginricksha* stopped and she got out.

"It is here; it is here!" she cried, coming up to him, and taking him by the hand as if she was leading a child, pulled as though by main force she would drag him out of his vehicle.

"*Oide!*" (Come along!) "Don't you know?" she said as she led him back a few yards and then stopped at a not very attractive-looking tea-house, and Kingsley now saw it was the one where they had first met. He would never have found it again himself. O Hana was looking up at him almost anxiously. "Ah, you not forget!" she exclaimed as she perceived he recognized it.

"No, no, Chisai. *Dai job, wakarimas. Honto, honto.*" (Excellent, I remember very well indeed, truly.) She clapped her hands joyfully at the words and the complimentary use of her own language, forgetting that it was a signal for calling the tea-house servants, and laughed as their answering "*heghs*" seemed welcoming her coming there again and echoing the reminiscences of that hour when this great man unbent to her and their eyes first laughed together.

"And Kinshan must see too," he continued, taking him from his nurse and carrying him with one arm, while O Hana, who would not let go his other hand until he was safely seated on the mats, convoyed them proudly to the humble dwelling.

"And I will make the *ochar dai*" (stand treat), she exclaimed, pulling a *rio* from her *obi*, and tossing it with the air of a smiling queen bestowing largesse on the little tray on which the everlasting tea had been presented.

"*Hegh!*" said Kingsley, drawing in his breath with stately ceremony and bowing to her, after depositing Kinshan on the mats to prevent his spoiling the effect. "*Okin arriato.*" (Many, many thanks.) O Hana was all mirth, from eyebrows to toes,



as she looked at him and with forfeit-like mimicry returned his salute.

Presently Kingsley slipped off his boots and O Hana her sandals, and they were ushered to their rooms, where they played with Kinshan until dinner was ready. Kingsley manifested complete satisfaction at everything, as no man could do more gracefully when he chose, and his leonine air, the slow dignity of his movements, and his deep bass voice were as blazoned banners to O Hana, whose very stature seemed to rise as she criticized all the finikin little comestibles with which their board was spread.

There were provisions of their own of a more satisfactory character as well, but Kingsley affected not to see them, and eat one curiosity after another with a gusto half feigned, half real; but he drew the line at sake. That he would not take, but claret instead, and this pleased O Hana too, for did he not kiss the cup before he gave it to her, another form of that strange love-ritual he had taught her; and she never dreamt that whim was half his thought. Never was she so proud and happy.

The next day they continued their journey along the Tokaido where it runs parallel to the seashore, until they arrived at Odawarra. There they left their *ginrickshas* and began to ascend the hilly road to the Hakone Pass. O Hana and the nurse went in kagos, but Kingsley walked. The long *ginricksha* journey had dulled his spirits, and he thought a little exercise would do him good. But at first it had no effect, and his gloom deepened into a dismal carping spirit, which in default of any more serious matter dwelt on O Hana's whim in going to Hakone. Just then a Japanese nightingale sounded his jerky note; one drawn-out pleasing chord raising expectation, and then a sudden nipping off with a sharp whistle, discordant and mocking. It suggested to Kingsley's darkened mood a reveller suddenly realizing that all is vanity.

But when they crossed the mountain stream and began to ascend in real earnest, his melancholy subsided, and he strode by O Hana's kago like a giant, and as they rose higher and higher the exhilarating mountain air braced him, and he chatted merrily with her and asked the coolies how they would like to carry him instead of her. They had to rest frequently, and he lit a cheroot and sat down and pointed out the lizards to Kinshan, and the

voice of the nightingale as it came at intervals seemed now like that of another little merry child, and the frequent hissing of the great grasshoppers, scissor-grinders as he called them, was like a sociable boiling tea-kettle accompanying them everywhere.

After a toilsome ascent they arrived at their destination. It was a village on the Tokaido, just before it threads the Hakone Pass, some two thousand feet above the sea level, on the borders of a lake supposed to be the crater of an extinct volcano. Hills were all around and an air of gloomy calmness pervaded the scene.

When they entered their tea-house Kingsley had a bath, dressed himself leisurely, and went to see if O Hana had completed her toilet and was awaiting him in the room where they were to partake of their evening meal. She was not, only the nurse and Kinshan were to be seen. There was a goban board, no doubt ordered by O Hana, and Kingsley to amuse his little son pulled out some of the counters for him to play with.

After a few minutes he asked the nurse where O Hana was. She replied that she did not know, with that look of absolute vacuity of knowledge which Japanese servants can so well assume; a citadel of refuge in which they can rest comfortably while their masters and mistresses vainly worry over the mysteries of life, instead of taking things as they come—or go. Kingsley knew that look well, and could often distinguish it from the less marked but more difficultly simulated aspect of real nescience, and did not reply. Words were vain; deceit ran in the race like the blood in their veins.

Presently he went to the other end of the tea-house which fronted the Tokaido and began to talk to the innkeeper and his wife. As O Hana did not turn up they continued chatting a considerable time, and Kingsley learnt that Prince Kusatzu was staying with numerous attendants at another tea-house, and the innkeeper, who had perhaps expected his highness's custom though he had not been favoured with it, remarked that they were a rowdy lot and he would be very glad when they were gone. At the name, O Hana's absence, tinged as it were for a moment by the shadows of that melancholy spot now deepening into night, assumed a dark significance which stirred a fierce thrill through Kingsley's frame. It passed in an instant, and he laughed aloud at the absurdity of his thought, and as if in answer O Hana came through the gloom into the light of the entrance,

and stood before him, flushed and almost panting as though she had hastened to shorten her absence as much as possible. She gave a little start of surprise on seeing him, and began to apologize for being away, and hoped she had not delayed her lord's dinner. There was a little air of mystery about her, as with the complacency of one who has nearly completed some difficult task requiring tact and diplomacy and is entitled to rest and relaxation, she said to the innkeeper:

"*Taberu, taberu, jiggi!*" (Dinner, dinner, quickly!), and then remarked to Kingsley that he must be very hungry and tired after walking so much, and led the way to their room.

Her voice and presence dissipated Kingsley's thoughts, and yet left a curious residue of them in his mind, like a memorandum to be referred to on a future occasion, and they were soon seated at dinner, where O Hana, who was always very temperate, took three little cups of claret, which was quite an unprecedented excess on her part. She was as gay as ever, yet Kingsley thought he detected a shadow of uneasiness now and then. After dinner she challenged him to a game of goban, and beat him two games out of three, her little fingers darting across the board in vivid contrast to his deliberately placed moves.

She was triumphant with a zest wholly disproportionate to the frivolous interest of the game, as if her success was an omen of good luck. They had just finished when a letter was brought for her, and it was announced that the bearer was waiting for an answer. She opened it, and still triumphant, scribbled a line or two in reply. Kingsley's looks rested questioningly on her.

She smiled mysteriously, but said nothing, except to suggest that they should now have one of the more complicated forms of the game they had been playing, and here Kingsley was quite a child in her hands, and never had any show at all. He pretended to be quite incurious, but that mental memorandum kept nudging his memory pertinaciously. However, they were both tired, and after deciding that on the morrow they would make an excursion to the Ten Provinces Stone, they shortly retired to rest.

Next morning dawned in loveliness on all the hills, but Hakone still slumbered in shadow, and Kingsley thought that the dark weirdness of the lake was even more striking than on the previous evening. The whole region seemed an inky spot marring the surrounding brightness; a place for skulking crime and terror.

and tragedy. A vague gloom clouded his spirits like the shadows of the hills those dusky waters. He shook it aside; pah! he would not question her; it was some of her playful fooling, no doubt, and he would not spoil it.

"*Ohaio de gozarimas. Hiken*" (The top of the morning to you! Look at me?), exclaimed O Hana, coming to his side, robed in a light-coloured *kimmono* (outer dress), and with her waist encircled by a broad dark red *obi*, which was Kingsley's favourite, and hers therefore also.

He looked at her and tried to smile approvingly, but could not; she seemed standing against a dark background like a thunder-cloud, and the *obi* suggested blood.

"*He, Oki Daibutsu san! Naze?*" (Oh, Great Buddha! Why?) She looked puzzled at his sombre expression.

He took her up and hoisted her on his shoulder, and sliding open the paper-glazed door at the back of the room which looked out upon the lake, strode out, and carrying her to the shore, said:

"How would you like to be drowned in that lake?" He knew not why he said it; only the words seemed a sort of relief. But she laughed and pulled his beard. Then she put her hands over his eyes and said:

"*Hayaku, hayaku! Sa!*" (quickly, quickly! go!), as if he was a horse and she was urging him on. In that darkness some fiendish association of ideas suggested furious thoughts, and he staggered.

"*Abunai!*" (Take care!), said O Hana, taking her hand away. And with the daylight Kingsley was himself again, all but that little haunting spot of memory, and carrying her safely back, he deposited her in her room, where with many laughing *arriatos* she requited him for her ride.

They breakfasted, and O Hana gave many directions to the nurse to look after Kinshan, and then they started on their picnic, O Hana in a *kago* and Kingsley walking, while a third coolie carried the luncheon. They left the Tokaido at the pass through the hills, and ascended on the westward side, and through many a pleasant winding path reached the Stone of the Ten Provinces, so called from its commanding prospect, a little after midday.

They cast their eyes over the scene, lovely everywhere. Hills and wooded slopes were all around; the paddy fields here and there in the distance seemed but brilliant patches of the most

verdant grass ; and over the billowy landscape Fusi-yama, like a snowy beacon, seemed to rule, girthed in clouds, and carrying its head in a frozen serenity which contrasted gloriously with the misty blue of the further hills and the teeming evergreen prospect below.

Westward stretched away the heights of Idzu into the blue sea, with the bay on one side, where Atami basked in sunshine and orange groves spread along the shore, while on the other Numadzu lay nestling with its groves of pines almost skirting the water. In the far distance the volcanic island of Vries blurred the horizon, smoking sulkily. It was more marked than usual, and Kingsley remarked it to O Hana.

She looked in the direction in which his arm was pointing : " He is smoking his pipe," she said gaily.

It was a bright breezy day : the wind following the sun was south-easterly ; genial and pacific as the ocean over which it had come, for in Japan, where everything is reversed, even the qualities of the winds are different, and it is from the east that nature's breath, purified by many a salt league, is sweetest and guileless of those noxious emanations which large continents reek into its arms.

As they both surveyed the scene he thought the prospect not unlike parts of Devonshire and Cornwall which he knew well. Only all the tints were brighter, the sun hotter, and the buzz of insect life replaced the English calm. And she, he thought, was like the elf of rustic tradition, a race banished from the busy haunts of civilization to the isles of the far East.

She had made great preparations for their luncheon, and now she began to bustle about. She directed the coolies to bring the bamboo basket which contained it to a level spot ; then she unpacked it, spreading a napkin for a tablecloth and arranging everything as confidently as if she was a past mistress in the art, and as if the queer combination of Japanese and English appointments was a perfect triumph of harmony.

Then remarking how tired he must be, she helped him to everything she could think of, eating little trifles herself in parentheses, and the incense of her attentions played round Kingsley like the breeze, an artless phase of that sorcery which Oriental women can handle so skilfully in a thousand different ways. He felt a curse was on him, and the next moment he was laughing with her at nothing, nothing but the shadow of a cloud

moving along the grass, or a waving bamboo clump, or a hovering bird, for to all these things O Hana was perpetually alive, and was endlessly pointing them out as if part of a performance specially arranged for they twain.

Then Kingsley lit a cheroot, and O'Hana brought out her little pipe of brass and bamboo and smoked in company, and was as much diverted by the matches as if they had been fireworks. Just as Kingsley was thinking, in a lucid interval as it were, how childish she was, she said :

"What will you do with all your red lacquer?"

"Oh, I shan't sell that."

"You will give it to Kinshan, and Kinshan will give it to his son, always? *Nani?*" (Is not that it?) Kingsley nodded and noted her now thoughtful looks.

"So it will go for ever" She tapped the ashes out of her pipe with an air of satisfaction as if some weighty matter had been decided. "Ah! *Narahodo*," she murmured with a thoughtful sigh, as though contemplating some half-sad, half-sweet mystery. It was a new mood in her, and she seemed looking on the scene around and below as if it was a future which her mind's eye could equally command.

It was now the time of her usual siesta; she drew nearer to him; drowsiness closed her meditations and she sank into slumber by his side. He arranged a shade over her face and smoked on, thinking of the future and Kinshan. How lightly he had woven this tie, and what would be the end? But his thoughts did not travel far in this direction; in Japan few people think much of the future, the sun is too bright.

When they arrived at the tea-house on their return O Hana seemed very fidgety. She kept stopping every now and then in the middle of dinner as if listening for something, and whenever her eyes rested on Kingsley there was an unusual brightness in them. She did not talk much, but seemed expecting something to happen every moment. Kingsley felt the contagion of her manner, and it woke all his vague surmises. At last he felt that he could never sleep that night if he kept on brooding, and said he should take a little walk before going to bed.

O'Hana seemed startled at this for a moment and then exclaimed:

"Oh, *eurishi, eurishi! Ke wo tsukeru!*" (Be careful!)



Then she smiled, and putting her hand into her *obi*, bulged it out, and the light falling on it brought out its dark ruby glint. "Is it not beautiful?" she cried.

Kingsley, wanting to be off, assented carelessly. His indifference seemed to touch her, and she said, as though trying to coax him:

"To-morrow p'raps we go Inoshima? You like?" As he looked on her expression of childish cunning she gave a little triumphant whistle. Just as he was leaving she exclaimed:

"Oh, give me five rios?"

Almost angry at her mystery, yet restraining himself, he gave them to her and went out quickly. The night air was cool, but his thoughts were burning. Kusatsu! That letter! And now that money! What did it mean? How could he, a foreigner expect that any tie of his binding could restrain the influence of deeply-rooted associations like community of race and language, and perhaps, as her father's behaviour would imply, the attraction of a fancied position? Pshaw! Why did these chimeras seem in that gloomy valley to loom into realities? It was nothing but his own morbid fancy, his liver was out of order; he would walk it off. But the thoughts kept coming again and again, and their absurdity in that land, where everything was absurd, was their strength. He walked on rapidly, not caring where he went, until he found himself nearly half-way down the Tokaido towards Odawarra. He pulled up, and somewhat more cheerfully turned back.

It was late when he approached Hakone, and when he was yet a quarter of a mile or so from the village he most unaccountably stumbled and fell flat on the ground. As he lay prostrate for a moment or two, he felt the earth trembling under him like a jelly, and a deep booming sound was distinctly audible, suggesting fiends struggling in dark depths below. He at once recognized it as an earthquake, and a very severe one. He got up and hurried up the steep boulder-paved road as fast as he could go, and as he came to the village found it a scene of confusion. People were scattered about the road with ejaculations of fear on their lips, some huddled together, and some rushing frantically away.

Hardly glancing at them, Kingsley ran on to the tea-house, but he could not discover it at first, the place was wrecked. Some

houses had fallen down, some were twisted awry, and in one or two places they were extinguishing fires which threatened to add their desolation to the scene. At length he recognized their resting-place, and he met the nurse close by. She wailed when she recognized him, but was too distracted to answer his hurried questions connectedly. Bidding her in severe tones to follow him he strode over the *débris* and found his way to their chamber.

There she lay with Kinshan by her side, both dead. A beam had fallen on her neck as she lay, and had crushed the child's head in completely. Kingsley, with a strength which in his excited state was no effort, lifted the beam and cast it with an oath against the wall. Then he knelt down and with a trembling gentleness essayed to lift her head; it moved limply on her neck, which was broken.

One of her arms was round Kinshan, the other clasped something wrapped in silk to her breast. After awhile Kingsley with reverent wonder examined what it was she had been hugging so closely. On removing the wrappers he disclosed a lacquered box curiously fashioned in the form of a Japanese character. It was beautifully designed and ornamented, and of a deep rich red colour, and as the feeble light of the still burning lamp fell upon it, its dark ruby was glinted here and there with a brighter hue, like blood. It was warm with her touch, and his hands trembled as he took it.

The nurse had now succeeded in reaching him and he questioned her about the box, threatening her with the most awful fate if she did not tell the exact truth in every particular. He found she knew all about it, but had been strictly enjoined by her mistress to say nothing of the matter to Kingsley, as she wished to surprise him.

It appeared that O Hana had been bargaining with its owner for it in Yedo for some weeks, but could come to no agreement. Then he said that as he had to go to Hakone to see some relatives, he should take it with him and try and sell it to Prince Kusatzu, whom he had heard was staying there. However, he did not succeed in doing so, and O Hana got it at last, and it arrived a very short time after Kingsley had left the tea-house. Inside the box was a receipt for forty rios, and also the other five which Kingsley had given her, evidently a little surplus secured

by her in the possible event of her not being able to get it with the money already in her possession.

As Kingsley saw the meaning of everything, and realized that if he had been by her side that paltry beam could not have crushed them, his thoughts went groping downwards in darkness. He looked such a statue of awful savage grief that the other tenants of the tea-house coming back to collect their belongings from the wreck, were arrested at his aspect as if they had seen the evil spirit of the earthquake incarnate.

He lay down by her side and caressed her. As he did so he felt another slight shock of earthquake, and in that moment his only desire was that the earth would open and swallow them all in one grave.

Not long after this the Japanese Government offered Kingsley liberal terms in commutation of his agreement, which he accepted and took the first steamer home. As he viewed Fusi-yama for the last time, hiding its guilty front with innocent snow, his eyes glared, and if any one asked him about his Japanese experiences he cursed.

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## Bride.

By E. M. JAMESON.

FAR away on that rugged coast of Ireland against which the Atlantic beats its waves, Bridget Hagan lived with her grandfather. Bride, as she was called, was a pretty child, with a look of dawning womanhood in her troubled grey eyes. She and Tim inhabited a lean-to cabin beyond the village, a tiny place, perched midway down the cliff, and looking, but for the trail of smoke curling upwards from its peat fire, like some wild bird of passage pausing in its flight.

Tim Hagan was a happy-go-lucky ne'er-do-well, who loitered about all day with his battered caubeen cocked rakishly on the side of his head and a pipe in his mouth. He made mysterious disappearances at nightfall. He was known to live well, and the villagers had their suspicions, but Tim Hagan was such a "broth" of a boy, his locks were so silvery, and his eyes so like those of his grandchild, that many sins were forgiven him. His only son, Bride's father, had been drowned one stormy night when

out in his fishing smack, a short time before Bride's birth, and the young wife soon followed him. How Bride ever grew into the healthy child she became was a marvel, and due mainly to the good-will of the village women, who looked after her with the unselfishness that the very poor evince towards each other.

As time passed, Bride drew herself, little by little, away from these friends of her childhood. She felt that they regarded her grandfather with suspicion, and all the tenderness in the child's nature was lavished on her sole remaining relative. She toiled for him, carried peat, and dug and hoed their plot of potatoes until her back ached cruelly, while the old man dozed in the sun at the door of the cabin, his short black pipe dropping sideways from his mouth. With all her love for him, Bride was awakening slowly, but none the less surely, to the knowledge that her grandfather's behaviour was not all that it should be. At first, when rabbits and other delicacies made their appearance in the cabin, she believed the plausible tales Tim told to account for their presence, and enjoyed them too. But that was earlier in life, when everything was taken for granted, rabbits and her grandfather's goodness included. There was a time when she cooked the rabbits for him, and subsisted on potatoes and stir-about herself. Tim rallied her on her want of appetite, but nothing he said could move her. Life seemed just a little hard to Bride at times, though she did not think much about it, and it was indeed partly her own fault in detaching herself from the village life. Hard work all day was followed by a wild scramble along the coast, just out of reach of the waves as they frothed in. Bride loved the sea; its voice had been her cradle-song from childhood, and she knew every cave and tiniest cranny for miles around. When the storm-wind blew and dashed the spray against the window of the little cabin, she felt a wild exultation that made her hasten over her work, in order that she might run out and feel its salt breath on her cheek. Bride, latterly, had neglected her religion, an unusual thing among the Irish peasantry. She stayed away from the little chapel because her grandfather refused to go, and afterwards, though good Father Barry talked to her, she was ashamed to appear there after so long an absence. Yet she had a religion of her own, and had hung up her dead mother's crucifix in a cranny of the rocks and she prayed a sort of incongruous prayer when she felt her sins pressing upon her,

that must surely have made the very angels smile. The kind old priest saw that the child was passing through a curious phase of her life, and he had the sense to leave her religion to assert itself later on, and when he called at the Hagans' little cabin would talk pleasantly on every conceivable topic save religion, and would give Bride much valuable advice where the plot of "praties" was concerned. His kind heart ached for the motherless child, and feared for her too, I think, a little, until one day, in his walks abroad, he came across the little cave that contained the crucifix, and saw the delicate shells and wreaths of sea-weed arranged with care before it.

"Poor little child," he said, with a shake of the head and a mist before his kind old eyes, "poor little motherless child."

One day Bride was bending over her spade, hot and tired. This was one of her bad days. The sun was striking fiercely on her back, the ground was parched and dry, and difficult to make any impression upon.

There was thunder in the air, and no breath ruffled the dark waters that lay beneath her. Bride straightened herself wearily and brushed the hair from her hot brow.

A voice behind her broke the silence.

"Give me the spade," it said; "this work is too hard for you, child."

Bride turned round quickly and met the blue eyes that glanced down at her. The young man looked puzzled for a moment, then he smiled delightedly.

"Why, it's never little Bride?" he said, after another glance to make sure. "Little Bride Hagan? I've come home, little Bride, to live among my own people and settle down. I'm tired of wandering about, and there's no place like old Ireland after all."

Bride curtsied gravely. This must be the young master who had come back to the great house. He had not visited the village for several years, and Bride could only just remember the tall boy who had sometimes treated her to lollipops at old Mother Ryan's.

She curtsied again, with downcast eyes, and did not see the smile on Gerald O'Reilly's face as he looked at the demure figure before him.

Bride was a picture in the short skirt that showed her bare

brown feet; and the red nappikeen tied over her black hair, with the corner dipping into her serious eyes.

The young master took the sunburnt hand in his, and shook it gently.

In his eyes Bride was still a child, if a lovely one, and she was small, and looked younger than her seventeen years.

"Are you glad I've come home, little Bride?" he asked. He was brimful of happiness himself, and felt that the world was not the bad place to live in that some people seemed to imagine. And Bride told him that she was glad that he had come home to live among his own people, and worshipped him for his kind words, and genial, happy smile. He insisted upon helping to dig up the plot, in spite of her protestations. Then he went to speak to Tim, whose tobacco smoke was curling up towards the potato-plot slowly in the heavy atmosphere. Left to herself, Bride leaned her arms on the low stone wall and looked out to sea. As she stood there she saw the young master running down the cliff road in the direction of the village.

A sudden passionate prayer rose to Bride's lips, "Blessin's on ye for yer kind deed and kinder words, Masther Gerald!" She found her grandfather sitting by the door-step, chuckling softly to himself. When they sat down at the rickety table for their meal, Tim put a piece of rabbit on his fork, and regarded it, looking meanwhile like a silver-haired saint, and then chuckled softly again. Bride looked at him, and a sudden chill feeling that contracted her heart forbade her asking the reason of his mirth.

"Ye'd betther ate a bit, mavourneen," said he, looking at her, where she stood, turning the potatoes out of the pot; "'twill be mighty quare if we get wan in a hurry. Och! sure, 'twas dyin' I was wid laughin' to think av the young masther fornint the very door." He cackled again, and wiped the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand. It was too much. Bride, with a crimson face and choking heart, thrust the dish of potatoes in front of him, and, despite his exclamation that "the devil himself had hould o' the colleen," rushed out at the open door and down to the beach. Oh, the shame of it, the burning, dreadful shame, that her grandfather should be a thief! She had never acknowledged it to herself before. That anybody belonging to her should steal from the young master, who had a kind



word for every one! A change came over Bride after that day. The burden of her grandfather's guilt lay heavily upon her. She no longer sang over her work, but accomplished it in silence. She grew thinner, and her eyes more wistful, until a look came into them and stayed there, that brought a lump into the good priest's throat. Bride was one of the best beloved of his flock, and the hardest to approach, perhaps more thought of and loved for that very reason. He saw that the girl had something preying heavily on her mind, something that she dared not talk about, and though he delicately hinted at her trouble, such a terrified, wild look came into her eyes that he changed the subject with a sigh.

Tim was an amusing old man, with a fund of humour, and the young master often came and sat beside him on the wooden bench at the cabin door, and listened to his anecdotes. But Bride stayed indoors or went to the beach when she saw him coming. She could not meet the frank eyes of the man her grandfather was cheating. Gerald O'Reilly thought her strangely altered from the merry little girl he had known years before, and told Tim that he kept her too hard at work.

One day down in the village, Bride heard that there was company at the great house, and gay doings, for the young master was going to keep up his birthday in the good old style. The grand English lady he was going to marry had arrived with ever so many other gentlefolks the day before. "Ye will be footin' it yerself, Bride," said one woman good-naturedly, and then, coming nearer in order that the gossips should not overhear her, "I've the dacentest little flowered cotton ye iver laid eyes on, and ye could wear it wid mighty little altering to fit ye. Ye may have it wid all the pleasure in life, asthore Feth! ye'd hould yer own wid the best av them, an' be the purtiest colleen there." She added the last words by way of encouragement, for she was a born matchmaker, and determined that Bride's good looks should not be thrown away. Bride smiled and thanked her, but shook her head too, and, raising her basket, turned homewards.

Her way lay along by the cliff, and in the distance she could see the smoke from their peat fire curling upwards.

Bride placed her basket on the rocks and pushed back the hood of her little red cloak. How hot it was! She gazed before

her with unseeing eyes, and thought of herself among the gay villagers dancing in the barn. Why should not she wear the gaily-flowered gown that motherly Mrs. Riley had offered, and dance with as light a heart and heels as the best of them? Why should she not dance up the middle and down again, and foot it in the jigs, every whit as lightly as Peggy Fagan, the village coquette, to the strains of Larry O'Connor's wheezy fiddle? She was lost in this day-dream when voices sounded close beside her—the speakers had paused behind a jutting rock.

"A curious set of people these Irish, Gerald," said a clear voice, with a ring of disapproval in its tones.

"They are the warmest-hearted people you ever came across, Beatrice, and when you live amongst them, my dearest, you will understand and appreciate them. Now, old Tim Hagan is the most original, quaint old chap. Surely you were struck by his manner. Why, if you had been a duchess——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted his companion, still somewhat disdainfully, "most picturesque; but what tobacco he smokes, and how do they exist in that smoky atmosphere! Besides, I have heard that these Irish are terrible deceptions and say one thing to one's face and another behind one's back."

He broke into a laugh that was somewhat forced.

"Impressions taken from some book you have been reading. After all, dear, I'm an Irishman myself, and very proud of the fact. You will acknowledge yourself to have been in the wrong, some day. I am so sorry the old man's grandchild was out; she is a pretty child, and when she grows up there will be a breaking of heads on her account, or I'm much mistaken. Seems a sad little thing. The Irish nature is such an intense one that they magnify troubles sometimes into a tragedy, and then seem to throw their griefs off as lightly. Life is not one huge joke to them as some people imagine."

Bride had risen ere this, and caught up her basket with a wildly-beating heart, just as the speakers turned the corner of the rocks. She did not look up until the young master said:

"Why, here's little Bride coming from market."

Bride's face was flushed, her eyes bright; her hood was half off her dark curls. She looked up and curtsied, but her heart within her was sore and hot with indignation. She caught a glimpse of a face framed in golden hair, that seemed to her little

short of angelic, and lips that belied the unkind words they had uttered. Poor little Bride! with all her hurt soul in her eyes she glanced at them both, dropped another curtesy and slipped by, never pausing until she reached the cottage. Her eyes were aching with unshed tears, and her heart still had that sore, hurt feeling, but there was no time to think, for Tim's dinner must be prepared.

A week passed by. The young master and his lady-love came no more to the little cabin. One day Bride saw the young couple in the distance. The young "leddy" was evidently not in her element when climbing rocks, for she paused every moment to borrow assistance from her lover's strong arm.

Since the day she heard them, the words the beautiful stranger had uttered rang continually in Bride's ears. And the cruellest part of it all was that, with regard to her grandfather, the words were true. Nevertheless, Bride's hot Irish blood was up in arms. What right had this English stranger to take away their characters? Bride hated her, hated her with all the vehemence of her nature. Even the crucifix at which she said her prayers was neglected. One day when she went to the little cave she found that the tide had been higher than usual, and the waves had forced their way in, sweeping away her offerings of shells and seaweed, and even disfiguring the dead Christ with spray.

Bride's heart was hardened. She sat down on a heap of pebbles, her hands folded listlessly on her knee.

They were so bad and wicked, she and her grandfather, that the blessed Christ did not care what became of them.

She sat there watching the waves curl in and pour their boiling froth over the rocks. It was a desolate stretch of coast, and dangerous too, to any one who did not know it well. The intense desolation overwhelmed Bride after a time, and she rose and wandered on and on along the shore, each step disclosing a scene of more rugged splendour. The sun was setting and the tall grey crags were bathed in its red glow. The waves rolled in, gleaming with opalescent splendid tints of crimson and pink and amber. Bride was the only creature who ever wandered there, for it was far from the village and hard work clambering over the slippery weed-covered rocks. The cliffs thereabouts, with the exception of one place, rose skywards like an iron wall, and were as unassailable. When the tide came in, small chance

was there for any one caught by it. To-day it suited Bride's desolate mood, and she found a comfort in the sighing and moaning of the waves as they swirled over the rocks.

She was stooping to pick up a bit of wood when a cry was borne towards her on the breeze ; then it drifted away again.

Bride raised her head and listened. Again it came, rising and falling weirdly. The girl's heart beat fast. Shadows were gathering, and the base of the cliffs showed grey and ghostly, only at the summit they still gleamed rosily, where the paling sunbeams kissed them, as if loath to go. Like all her race, Bride was superstitious to the core, and her first thought was of the supernatural. Had not her grandfather told her of the moaning that rose and fell round the little cabin on the stormy night her father was drowned ? A ghostly "keening" that drove the colour from the cheek of the anxious wife, who knew what it portended.

Again the cry came, but this time there was a human ring in the sound, and Bride arched her hands above her eyes and peered out. The light was uncertain, but she fancied she could see something in the distance. She started at a clambering run, for she was sure-footed as a goat, and her bare feet enabled her to gain a footing on the masses of seaweed. There was no sound now to guide her ; she could only follow the direction from whence the cry had come. Bride left the cliff path and safety far behind her, but she did not pause to think about that. The tide was pouring in, hurrying and swirling over the rocks in mad, devouring haste. Bride had delayed her departure for home later than usual, and now it was likely to be even later than she bargained for. There was a space of water between her and the crouching figure she presently caught sight of, but Bride girded her petticoats higher and plunged in knee-deep. She was out of breath when she came upon some one who lay prostrate on the rocks, where only a couple of feet divided her from the last wave that washed in. Bride saw the rim of a white cheek and a lock of hair that, warm and golden, had fallen loosely and mingled with the brown sea-weed. She looked down upon the unconscious object of her hatred and hesitated. Should she leave her and turn back to safety ?

Leave her to be carried out by the waves and dashed back perhaps upon the rocks again until——

What would the fair face be then? A battered wreck that men would cover up decently, and try to think of no longer. Bride shuddered; the black wave of hatred and sin was swept away from her soul, and the next moment with a great cry she dropped upon her knees. "Holy mother av Jesus an' all the blessed saints forgive me," she said, and put her face close to that of the prostrate figure. She bathed the still face, scooping the water up in her hands.

The stranger moaned, moved restlessly, and opened her eyes.

For an instant her eyes and Bride's met in a long glance, then the stranger's fell, and she moaned again.

Bride dragged a smooth flat stone that lay at a distance, and placed it beneath the other's head, all the time revolving on ways and means of rescue. There was no time to lose.

Beatrice Heriot was a spoilt darling, and not in the habit of consulting anybody's convenience when it came in the way of her own.

Her moans cut Bride to the heart. "Och, what is it that ails ye, miss, at all, at all?" she said, her grey eyes growing very pitiful as she noted the deadly pallor of the English "leddy's" face.

"My ankle; I sprained it when I fell; it is agonizing. I cannot move. Gerald, Gerald, why don't you come to your poor Beatrice?"

Bride's eyes widened with horror, and she uttered a quick exclamation. The other looked at her, and for the first time recognized her.

"I remember your face," she said. "Are you not the grandchild of the old man with white hair, who lives in the tiny house near the sea? What is your name, child?"

She looked at the little Irish girl with such cold eyes that Bride's old antagonistic feeling rose up within her.

"Bridget Hagan is me name, miss, but they call me Bride."

Beatrice Heriot nodded indifferently. "A pretty name; I remember it now." Then she lapsed into silence, only moaning occasionally. Bride noted the incoming tide with a feeling of desperate powerlessness. The path to the cliff road was already being cut off by the rapidly-filling pools of water. Even now to get there they must wade knee deep, or rather waist deep, through the water, and that was out of the question for the young lady with her sprained ankle.

It did not seem to occur to the latter that there was any danger. She imagined that presently people would come to look for her, and they must carry her, for she could not possibly walk. So she lay with closed eyes, while Bride's eyes ached with straining them over the stretch of waves that rolled in grey-green in the twilight. She must save Masther Gerald's beautiful sweetheart for him.

There was no comfort to be found on the water ; she wrung her hands and looked around her. The cliffs frowned down upon them, only the scream of a sea-mew broke the silence. Bride looked at the pale face that lay below her ; the waves had crept on and now they touched the hem of Beatrice Heriot's pretty gown. Bride dropped on her knees, a strange, resolute look illumining her face.

"We must move away from here, there's danger threatenin' ; we must go now, this very minit ; there's not many chances left, only wan, an' we must take it."

Beatrice opened her eyes, then closed them.

"Don't talk nonsense, child, it's quite impossible ; I could not walk a yard to save my life."

Bride caught at the last words eagerly. "Them's the thrue words ye're saying. Miss, troth, it's niver a lie I'd be afther tellin' ye. Look, there beside ye, the water creepin' and crawlin' at yer feet." The ringing insistence of her voice caused Beatrice Heriot for the first time to awaken to a sense of their danger. She followed the direction of Bride's outstretched hand and eager eyes and sprang to her feet ; then sank to her knees with a shriek of pain.

"What are we to do, Bride ? I cannot move from here. Think of something to save our lives."

The haughtiness was gone from her voice ; her blue eyes, wide with pain, made Bride's heart ache. "Sure, 'tis this long while I've been thinkin'," she said slowly, "an' now, even if ye could walk, we couldn't get back that way. The wather's too deep that runs betune. But there's wan place, a little ways along, just a weenshy cave, where ye'd maybe be safe from the tide. Could ye crawl, av I put me arm round ye, miss ? Ye'll thry ? Ah now, hould up wan minit. Whist, aisy now, wan shitep ; think o' the young masther. Och sure, 'tis only wan more turn," and half supporting, half coaxing, Bride managed to get her to the



mouth of the cave. It was as Bride had said, only a "weenshy" place, running in but a little way from the water. At the back of it was a narrow shelf of rock, and she knew that, except at the very highest tides, the water only lapped beneath the stone, and she knew too from experience that only one person, and that with some discomfort, could find a resting place upon it. The light was so faint within that they had to grope their way to the stone, upon which Beatrice hobbled with some difficulty and many groans.

Bride took off her own little shawl and tucked it round the other's feet, then she went to the mouth of the cave and looked out.

The tide was pouring in ; the wind had risen, and was beating up the surf upon the rocks in boiling jets of foam. The after-glow had faded, the twilight enveloped every object in a grey, uncanny light. Bride realized that now it was too late to seek assistance, and a belated nightbird that flew by above her head croaked out a dismal cry, that sounded like "too late."

She shivered as the waves splashed over her bare feet, and with cheeks wet with sea-spray and perhaps something else that was equally salt, she retreated into the cave. Had it been earlier, she might have found a footing on the cliff at a distance, but now it was too late. For many a day life had not been so dear to the little Irish girl as it was at this moment, and her thoughts flew back to Tim with the old yearning affection. Perhaps she might do more for him in Heaven than ever she had done upon earth, and with this thought uppermost she went back to wait. The wind was moaning through the mouth of the cave and finding strange echoes in its rocky sides, and for the second time that day Bride thought of the "keening" on the night of her father's death.

Beatrice Heriot gave a terrified shiver. "Bride, don't leave me ; give me your hand ; let me hold it, you are so brave, and I am such a coward ! Gerald, Gerald, why don't you come ?" Beatrice knew nothing of Bride's danger. She was selfish by nature and cultivation, and to do her justice it did not occur to her that the other might be in a more dangerous position than herself.

"Sure now, hould me han' tight," said Bride, with well-feigned cheerfulness, reaching up her hand, which the other grasped, until Bride grew numb holding it above her head.

Beatrice bemoaned her own hard fate and uncomfortable position until it grew dark, and only a faint light glimmered at the mouth of the cave. Bride's patience told after a while.

"Are you tolerably comfortable, Bride?"

"Yis, sure," replied Bride, hoping that the quiver in her voice would not be noticed, and trying too not to notice the water that was streaming in and flowing over her feet. She had given up her shawl, and had to bite her lips hard that the chattering of her teeth should not be heard. One thought was uppermost in her mind, Masther Gerald's sweetheart must be saved at any cost.

Beatrice dozed presently, tired out, until a movement from Bride aroused her.

"Are you there, little Bride?" she asked, unconsciously using Gerald's form of address. The words struck upon the girl's bewildered brain with a pleasant sound.

"Here, fornint ye, miss, houldin' yer han' tight. Whist now, thry and go to slape. Masther Gerald's sure to be roun' in the mornin'."

The brave accents were less brave now, for the icy water had crept on and Bride could with difficulty keep her footing. And Beatrice went to sleep again, too drowsy to notice.

When next she awoke the waters had receded, it was early morning, and the sun shone upon the tossing billows outside. Bride had slipped down upon the pebbles and was fast asleep, her head pillowed upon one outstretched arm. On the rocky wall, just above her head, a slender shaft of yellow sunlight quivered and trembled. There was a sound of voices borne upon the wind as a boat approached the cave, a boat that had started out at break of day in search of them.

But Bride slept on.

## The Cottage by the Line.

By THEODORE A. THARP,

Author of "CRADLED IN A STORM," "THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES," etc., etc.

UNDER the shadow of a railway embankment, on the Great North Midland Line, about a third of a mile from the small station of S——, nestled a little creeper covered cottage, standing in its own tiny garden. This was the humble abode now of a ruined gentleman and his only child.

General Cuthbertson had been well off, but disastrous gambling on the Stock Exchange had brought him to his present pass.

How he came to occupy this little cottage (the property of the Great North Midland, in which company he had once been an influential shareholder) was through the intervention of a friendly director, who, knowing of his great distress, had induced the company to offer this temporary refuge for himself and daughter, at a fractional rent, to spare his pride, and the General had gladly accepted it.

Rose Cuthbertson was a brave girl, as became a soldier's child—a heroine in adversity, and the greatest comfort to her poor old father. They kept no servant; she did everything herself, and her one aim in life was to help him to bear the burden of his broken fortunes.

The cottage stood quite alone, though it could scarcely be called a quiet retreat, owing to the frequent thunder of passing of trains, but to this they soon grew accustomed. The chief event of the day in their now uneventful lives was the going by of "The Wild Highlander," as he shrieked and roared and rattled along on his way to the Land o' Cakes, and the General made a practice of timing him when he passed the cottage, which was at 9.25 P.M., almost to the minute.

It was a stormy evening in autumn. A very boisterous wind, approaching an equinoctial gale, was blowing up the line, and merrily turning the telegraph wires into a far-reaching band of Æolian harps.

Rose and her father were seated by the fireside after their usual frugal meal, the old General smoking a long "churchwarden" (shades of his brother-officers excuse him!); Rose darning his

stockings. There had not been much conversation this evening ; Rose was very quiet.

"The Highlander's late to-night," observed the General, glancing at the cheap American clock on the mantel-piece through a puff of smoke.

"I suppose it's this high wind," said Rose.

"I suppose so ; it's almost enough to blow him off the line. I hope it won't blow him down here on the top of us," joked the General grimly.

They always spoke of the great express as "he," and seemed to look forward to its coming as one might to the daily visit of a friend. And a friend in an indirect manner "The Wild Highlander" was destined to prove to these poor exiles from the world.

"You seem rather absent this evening, Rosie, my child," remarked her father, after a minute. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing, darling. I don't feel very talkative, that's all. I've been thinking." Then there was a pause. Suddenly she asked, "Father, do you believe in dreams?"

"In pleasant ones when they come true, yes, my dear," said the General, smiling ; "but why?"

"I had such a vivid dream last night about Lady Templer. You remember her."

"Oh, yes, I remember her." This in a tone as though the old man had little pleasure in remembering.

"I dreamt I saw her lying on a bed looking so white and ill, and there was blood upon the pillow, and on the counterpane, and in the hand-basin near, and blood upon her hands and handkerchief—blood everywhere. It seemed to make me turn quite faint. I tried to speak to her, but could not. She didn't know me. Then the door opened and her son Claude came into the room and led me away from the bedside, and then I awoke, and—oh, I hope there is nothing ominous in such a dream. I can't get it out of my head."

"My dear child, don't trouble yourself about dreams. Surely you've enough realities to worry you. Besides, what are the Templers to you now?"

True, what were they to her now? Rose said no more, but this dream did trouble her. Her fair young face wore an expression of deeper sadness than usual, telling of another heavy

sorrow in the past besides her father's ruin—one of the results of that ruin—the sleeping sorrow that wakes and cries as something recalls it to mind. And this dream had done so. It had brought very clearly before her once more certain familiar faces of by-gone days—the better and happier days—days when the Templers and the Cuthbertsons were intimate friends, when Claude, the son and heir of Sir Wilfred and Lady Templer, had with the full approval of his parents become engaged to Rose Cuthbertson. Dearly he loved her, and she returned his love with a woman's interest. Then the crash came—that terrible blow which killed Rose's delicate mother—when the General and his daughter quickly experienced the bitter truth of how friends fall from us in adversity. It is an old, old, hackneyed story. The Templers—her ladyship at least—proved no exception. She was a hard woman of the world, worldly. They were wealthy people; there was no necessity for Claude to make a money marriage, and her ladyship well knew how devoted he and Rose were to one another; yet she felt constrained "with deep reluctance" to break off at once his engagement with the ruined man's child. Sir Wilfred had little voice in the matter—he was a cipher. Lady Templer held the reins.

It was done so cruelly, with such a disregard of feeling, notwithstanding the hypocritical pretence of regret, that the General was deeply incensed, and poor Rose broken-hearted. Claude protested, vowed how he loved her, should ever love her, and would never give her up, but his mother's influence was paramount; he was as completely under her ruling as his father, and so he did give her up, and they parted. And perhaps Rose felt disappointed that he had not held out more desperately for her sake.

This was five years ago, and the poor girl, eating her heart out in the little cottage by the line, for she was not one to forget, had neither seen nor heard of him since. And last night he and his mother had appeared to her in this dream.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

"Ha! here he comes at last," said the General, his ear catching above the wind the distant growl of the approaching "Highlander," as he crossed an iron bridge about a mile off.

Nearer and nearer he came, rushing along at high pressure against the opposing gale.

"Nineteen minutes late!" exclaimed the timekeeper, as the flying express presently dashed passed the cottage, shaking it to its foundations and making the windows rattle as from an earthquake, and went tearing on at fullest speed up the slight incline towards the station of S—.

Suddenly a terrific bang rends the air, like the report of an eighty ton gun. Crash, crash, clatter, crash! and the howling wind bears along the line a babel of fearful sounds—wild screams and shouts and cries for help, amid the angry roar of escaping steam.

Rose leapt to her feet, with a pale, terrified face. "Oh, my God! father," was all she exclaimed, and running into her bedroom she snatched something from her toilet table, and before the General could say a word, had darted out of the cottage into the night. In another few seconds she had scrambled over the railings, climbed the embankment, and was hurrying madly along the line to the fatal scene, for she knew that a terrible accident had occurred. No womanly curiosity, but sheer pluck and merciful instinct impelled her to fly to the rescue, and render what aid she could.

It was a dark night, but a few straggling stars revealed the appalling objects scattered around in a confused mass—the overturned carriages, splintered wood-work, grotesquely twisted iron, the quiet bodies of the killed, the writhing, groaning forms of the injured, the great engine reared up on end against some black objects in front, hissing and fuming as in agony from the collision, the fiery coals from its open furnace dropping out on to the six-foot-way and lending a lurid light to the ghastly scene; dark figures of the unhurt passengers and railway officials rushing wildly to and fro, some calling for help, some tending to the wounded and dying, some striving to extricate imprisoned passengers from the débris.

For the first few moments on reaching the spot, Rose felt sick and dazed, but quickly recovered herself and set to work amongst her poor mangled fellow-creatures, like the true Sister of Mercy that she was.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, great heavens! Lady Templer! it is—it is Lady Templer! Oh, my dream! my dream!"



Yes, there *was* something in that dream. There lay Lady Templer, white, bleeding and unconscious, as she had appeared to Rose the night before, and close by (though Rose did not know it) lay the corpse of her lady's maid, who was travelling with her up to Scotland.

Then a sudden thought transfixed the girl and made her heart stand still.

Was Claude Templer in that train?

In frantic terror she searched up and down and called for him by name on every side, but in vain. The uncertainty was awful, but poor Rose might have spared herself this panic. Claude was safe enough at that moment at his club in London. At length she gave up the search, and returning to the still insensible form of Lady Templer, devoted all her efforts to restoring her to consciousness. Plenty of helping hands were soon forthcoming; doctors telegraphed for from the station, nurses and other good Samaritans, and men with ambulances and stretchers, from the neighbouring town.

On one of these stretchers Lady Templer was gently laid and conveyed to the little cottage, at the request of Rose, who explained that she was a friend, while the remainder of the killed and injured were taken to the railway station, or, in the case of a few of the latter, to the nearest hotel.

This sadly-to-be-remembered accident, by which nine people lost their lives and fifteen were badly wounded, was caused, it turned out, by three heavy coal-trucks, which they had been shunting at S—, having in some way become detached and got on to the main line (presumably blown down the incline by the terrific force of the wind), right in the track of the express, which dashed at top speed into the obstruction, with the frightful result given.

For three weary weeks the General's tiny home was turned into an hospital, and the unfortunate lady, so strangely brought by fate within its doors, lay on Rose Cuthbertson's little bed fighting against the Great Conqueror.

Rose was untiring in her nursing, but from the first the doctors attending the case held out little hope. "Severe internal injuries" had been placed opposite her ladyship's name in the list of wounded, and even the eminent medical man, who came down specially from town at Sir Wilfred Templer's urgent

desire, could do nothing for her. Poor old Sir Wilfred himself, whom the shock of the terrible news had completely prostrated, was too near his own end to be able to attend the death-bed of his ill-fated lady.

During the last week, Lady Templer had regained consciousness, and slowly and gradually recognized in the attentive, devoted girl, who hovered around her pillow and anticipated her slightest want, Rose Cuthbertson, Claude's once affianced wife. She was amazed, bewildered, until Rose gently explained matters to her, when, deeply touched, she put out her hand and drew the girl down to her and kissed her, whispering with trembling lips, "Ah, my child, yours is an angel's revenge. May God reward you!" Then she expressed a wish to see the General, and the old soldier came to the bedside with all resentful feelings against her turned to deepest sympathy. Rose withdrew from the room, for her heart was too full to witness the interview. By-and-by she knew from her father that Claude had been sent for at his mother's request, and might be expected to arrive that same evening. So they *were* to meet again, and Rose felt that in this happy prospect she was already more than rewarded for the loving kindness she had shown towards the ill-fated lady.

\*     \*     \*     \*

"Yes, those were her last words, darling—that she wished us to be happy, and with my father her wish is law. Poor mother!"

Claude Templer's voice quavered as he held Rose, sobbing, to his heart, while the old General stood by as erect as on parade, with tears trickling down his withered cheek—tears which were of mingled emotions.

It was a strange blending of joy and grief at that moment. Disaster had parted the lovers, disaster had re-united them. Such are the inscrutable workings of Fate, which is of God, in the great tragedy of life.

The relieved signalman, passing along the line from his box on his way home to dinner, saw the blinds of the little cottage drawn down, and knew that all was over, and that another had been added to the list of victims who had perished from the wrecking of the Scotch Express.

## Unequally Yoked.

By ETHEL F. HEDDLE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE HONEYMOON.

EVERY one said it had been a charming wedding—"such a good-looking pair"—and there had been no hitch anywhere. Through the occasionally troubled waters of settlements and pre-nuptial arrangements, Roger Markham and Cecily Maynard had come out unscathed. He was too well off to care for the want of money on her side, and the vicar, her father, was too unworldly to ask for anything beyond a suitable provision for his daughter. The course of true love had run fast and smooth. Only six weeks after he first met her at the county ball, Roger married her. There was no reason why they should wait, and he was anxious, he said, to settle down. Markham Grange had stood long enough empty. And Cecily, who lived under a kind of spell in her love dream, had consented.

They went, after the ceremony in the quaint red brick church, where school children had strewn primroses and violets under the bride's feet, to Stratford-on-Avon first. Roger had asked his *fiancée*, as they wandered through the woods one day, where she would like to go for the honeymoon, and the colour had crept up softly in the girl's face.

"Oh, Roger—may I really choose? It has been the dream of my life to see the Shakespeare country: Ann Hathaway's cottage, and the river, and the woods he wandered in when he was a boy. May we really go there? Not for a tourist's day—but to stay there—and think of it all—you and I together?" She looked up at him with lovely limpid eyes—eyes like a child's—and Roger, who was very much in love, smiled, though his first glance had been rather blank.

"You're awfully fond of poetry and all that sort of thing, Cis," he said. "Of course, we'll go if you like. I don't mind."

It was not enthusiastic, but Cecily scarcely felt that. Everything Roger said and did she saw transformed through a kind

of rose-tinted haze, or, rather, over the footlights of her own imagination. So they went to Stratford.

It was early June, and the country was beautiful. The fogs from the river were gone, the Avon was limpid and clear, and murmured placidly as it flowed past them—just as it murmured, perhaps, in the ear of Shakespeare and his Ann—the roads were full of lilac tassels, and of laburnum with its pale gold, and the red may was not yet over, for spring had been late. Cecily in her white frock and shady hat, sat in the phaeton which her husband had hired, and was blissfully content driving about. She never spoke very much, and her mind now was too full of romance and poetry to be able to give it expression. She did not notice that Roger had lounged round the great man's birth-room, and listened to the custodian with a look of half-amused contempt. Stratford did not interest Markham at all. He thought it a stupid little hole, but it made a pretty background for Cecily's lovely, flower-sweet face. He waited for her while she stood dreamily by the window, her little slim hand resting on the rusty iron hook of the window.

"Only think, Roger; this was the first view he had of the world! I wonder what sort of a baby he was."

"Very like all others, I expect," Roger observed, stifling a yawn. "They are all alike. Ugly little flannel bundles, with a dab for a nose. I expect he howled as much as most. But come on, darling, it must be lunch-time, and I'm hungry. And one can't live on Shakespeare."

Cecily thought this was all just his laughing chaff, but Roger let her go back to the museum alone next forenoon, pleading letters, and after she had gone he grinned, half-ruefully, as he took a cigar from his case.

"By Jove! to think of the morning here like this! I'm glad she doesn't ask me how many of the old party's plays I've read. Never could stand 'em at school. A lot of howling rot, and you never know what he's driving at. He's as bad as the modern chap, Browning, and *he* is fit for a lunatic asylum, I think. Wonder if there is a *Sporting News* in the place, and how old Harry is doing with the horses?"

He sat down to write to his trainer, and then came back to read some pink sporting and society papers, which he found in the local stationer's and seized upon greedily.

Cecily came in for lunch, a wild-rose flush on her face.

"I've had such a lovely forenoon, Roger. Have you ordered the carriage for Shottery, dear? and are the tiresome letters all done?"

Roger looked up from his paper, still smiling at the joke he had been reading.

"Oh, yes, I soon polished 'em off. I got some papers. Have one, till the bell goes?"

But the *Sporting Record* and *Society Talk* did not seem to attract Cecily, and she went off to change her things. Somehow Ann Hathaway's cottage, though she could have stayed there for hours, was a little of a disappointment, why, Cecily did not even tell herself. Roger yawned and lit a cigar. He scoffed at the settle, and made jokes with the quiet old woman, which she did not seem to understand. Cecily looked up at him once with a curious faint surprise. Something in his tone of speaking to women in an inferior position jarred on her. It was at once familiar, patronizing and contemptuous—she had not noticed it before. And he hurried her away, though the old woman put a little posy of cottage flowers into the sweet young lady's hand before leaving, and Cecily thanked her gratefully.

Years after, her father found the posy in her "commonplace-book," with the date, and thought what happy hands must have put it there.

"*The little speck on garnered fruit*"—when do we notice it? When, even in that first month, did Cecily begin first to wonder, to think she had surely misunderstood, and was growing fanciful and critical? Roger Markham was not a bad man, by any means; he did not drink to excess, he did not very often swear, he had no vices. He was only coarsely fibred to the core, worldly and rather fickle. Many women would have taken him as he was and been quite content, but then, you see, Cecily had idolized him, and it seemed to her now as if some one else walked about in her husband's clothes and masqueraded with his face. He soon began to grow, not perhaps less fond, but less careful before her. The novelty of possession wore off. He read yellow-back novels of a doubtful type—Cecily looked into one and dropped it as if burnt—made curious rough jokes she did not see—told stories with *double entendres*, and laughed when his wife listened with puzzled eyes. On their way back

they went to London, and he took her to all that was to be seen. But he yawned at "King Arthur" and at the opera, and said it was "as bad as Shakespeare," and he seemed only to really enjoy the music hall and the Gaiety. And his London friends, loud-voiced men, chiefly horsey, puzzled her.

Cecily's letters home did not say much about London. The good vicar, re-reading them after service, thought the child seemed "a little tired."

"A dreadful rush, after this quiet place," he thought. "Dear me, I almost seem to expect her home—to see her walk up the path yonder, under the lilacs. But she will be settling down at the Grange; she is in good hands. Only it is dull without my little girl."

The vicar was a child in the world's ways, and a child might have read character better. Roger was a good squire and a good Tory, and he had gone to church punctually with Cecily. Mr. Hayward's mind was quite content.

So in autumn Mr. and Mrs. Markham went home, and the county all called on and dined them.

## CHAPTER II.

### THREE YEARS AFTERWARDS.

"He shall hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,  
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse."

TENNYSON

CECILY MARKHAM had given up reading poetry. Poetry is the joy of the happy and the light-hearted chiefly; it has a way of stabbing certain people with lines that seem written for them, turns of thought that seem to tear down a veil; but she had come across these lines in a book of illustrations to Tennyson to-day, and they had haunted her, as poetry will, even when unwelcome. It was three years after the Stratford honeymoon. Roger had roared over that episode often, while his wife sat silent, trying to smile, and his hearers did not look at Mrs. Markham's curiously sad eyes. She was quite a cheerful woman, and talked more than she used, but her eyes betrayed her sometimes, as eyes will.

"Ever hear of it?" he would say. "How my wife dragged me to Shakespeare's birth-place for the honeymoon, and made me hang round for hours, while she stood and had visions. Hamlet



and the mad old king and all the rest! Picture me! Miss Venne, picture *me*!"

"I can't!" Miss Venne said frankly. "A bull in a china shop wouldn't be so out of place, or a race-horse in the Louvre. You and I would be more at home at Ascot, I expect, than at Stratford. It's all a matter of taste."

At which, Roger, not a whit offended, gave another great roar. He had a very high opinion of Miss Venne, and she had been quite a long time with them in Markham Grange. She was very well off, and "went in" for everything new. She had arrived with a man to clean her bicycle and carry her golf-clubs; the maid she regarded as rather superfluous, for costumes were not her forte. Usually she wore a very short tweed skirt, a man's shirt and tie, and a sailor hat, and she rode her bicycle in knickerbockers. That may or may not be the sensible thing to do. I do not pretend to say, but somehow the costume did not suit Henrietta Venne. And yet she was very handsome in a big, blowsy, Junoesque style. Her admirers said Rubens would have enjoyed painting her, her enemies that Bet Bouncer's description in "She Stoops to Conquer" suited her best. She was good-natured, very loud of laugh and speech, utterly tactless, adored horses and dogs, and was a splendid horsewoman, tennis and golf player, bicyclist and pedestrian, and she had magnificent health and was a fair shot.

Roger met her first at Ascot, where she chaffed him freely, and he called her "a scorcher." That was the year Cecily's baby was born and died. Then Miss Venne put a piece of ice down his back, at a garden party, and he wrote she was "awful fun" and he was bringing her down to the Grange to "stir Cecily up a bit." He added, "There could be no dumps with her round."

She came again this year. Cecily had been delicate since the baby's birth, and Roger grumbled a good deal. "It was deuced hard lines on a man to have an ailing wife," he complained, both to her and to others, and Cecily heard, with that tight tension of lips, which was all she showed of the stab the words gave her. All the rosy veil through which she had seen him once was long ago rent asunder; she knew him for what he was, and yet her heart clung to him with a lingering affection still, the desperate maternal element which is in all good women's love surviving when all else died. "If you'd only rouse yourself," he would say

crossly, "and take up a hobby like other women. You sit fretting, I believe, for that child, a puking thing that would never have grown up, or done us any credit. Lord! you women beat all creation for folly."

Cecily was thinking of Tennyson's lines as she stood at the window now, looking out at the chestnuts dropping on the grass.

It was late September, but the Indian summer was with them, and the air was like June. The blackberry sprays were blossoming as if deceived and duped by the warmth; Cecily had even found a wild rose out amongst the hips and haws on the hedge, and stood looking at it regretfully. There had been wild roses in the hedges, tremulous, frail white things, the June day on which her baby slipped out of life. She was thinking of the line now—"Something better than his horse"—and her lips moved in a strange bitter smile. "Snap Dragon," one of his racers, had been ill lately, and Roger had been frantic with anxiety. In the midst of her spring illness, when the doctor looked grave and telegraphed to town for more advice, her husband had gone up to London to a dog show. "He does not hold me better than his horse," she said to herself. "I hold an inferior place in his heart! And yet—well, life has to be lived through! It was not only given one to be happy in! And one day—he may change."

"Cecily, Cecily! I say!"

She started at the loud voice—it had usually a tone of irritation in it when he addressed his wife. And then Roger appeared, gun in hand. "Where's Miss Venne?"

"Playing tennis, I think, Roger."

"And you moaning here alone, as usual. I wish to goodness you'd take exercise and get some colour into your face. It's like curds and whey. Why don't you ride?"

"I—I have no horse since Mayflower was sold," Cecily said patiently; "I am just going out. Shall I tell Miss Venne you are ready?"

"Oh, I'll look her up. No horse? Then, by Jove, I'll buy Lord Cantire's Dare Devil for you! She's a beauty, and going cheap. I'll see him to-day."

"I think he means to be kind," Cecily said as she stood at the window, watching him go down the drive. "I shall try and ride, and go out more, to please him. I could be more with

him, then, and he is so fond of the open air. If only I were not such a coward on horseback—and I dare not tell him."

Dare Devil was purchased by-and-bye, and a groom given instructions to "train him down a bit." Miss Venne rode him first, magnificently, and Roger watched her with delight. Lord Cantire had expressed doubt if she was suitable for a lady.

"By Jove!" he cried. "It's a treat to see you. I wish she was for you. Isn't she a beauty?"

"She suits her name," Miss Venne said. "I'm rather dubious about your wife managing her. She's a bit of a muff on horseback, isn't she?"

Roger laughed. "You've about hit it. It's odd, isn't it, my marrying a girl like that? She don't care a bit for sport—terrified, yet, at sight of a gun. It's rum, very rum."

Miss Venne listened, patting Dare Devil's velvety nose. The horse had a wild eye, but he let her do as she chose with him.

"The fact is your wife is Dresden china and you are Delf," she said coolly; "they don't suit on the same bracket."

"You're about right," and then he went off gloomily. He was conscious of no shame in discussing his wife; he often did so; his disappointment was no secret.

Cecily, strong in her desire to please him, mounted Dare Devil one day, and, led by the groom at first, rode up and down the avenue. Then she went by herself, with another of the house party, and the horse behaved beautifully—Miss Venne having "taken it out of him" the day before. Another time, however, he seemed nervous and fretty, and would not let her mount him at first, and Cecily drew back, her face changing colour.

Roger, watching from the doorway, scoffed openly. "I declare you haven't any pluck at all," he cried, "no more than a chicken. Send for Blue Bonnet and trundle behind us all on him, if you like."

The tone was insulting, but Miss Venne good-naturedly came to her hostess's relief.

"Suppose we change?" she said. "Dare Devil's a wretch, now and then, but she knows *me*."

And so they started, Roger watching gloomily before he mounted.

When the first fox hunt came there had been a big breakfast at the Grange, and Miss Venne rode her own hunter. Cecily

made up her mind to go. It would please her husband and she would conquer her dread and ride Dare Devil. Miss Venne and the other ladies had ridden him again and again, and declared him reformed.

The breakfast was a great success, and Roger was in high good humour. He started early with Miss Venne; he had not asked which horse his wife would ride; she meant to surprise him, and he understood she would come with the others and made no inquiry.

Cecily had felt better than usual lately, and she determined to conquer her dread. She came down the flight of steps in her habit, which was dark green, looking sweet and lovely, and one of the guests, a certain Colonel Gray, remembered later that she had talked and laughed more than usual while he and she waited for the other ladies.

And then they started, Dare Devil all that could be desired.

When the fox was first viewed the whole field went off with a rush. Roger had seen Cecily, raised his eyebrows, but he did not speak to her, and seeing him engrossed, she did not approach him. Somehow, how, no one knew, Mrs. Markham had been separated from the party, and when she was first observed, it was evident she had lost all control of Dare Devil. Her slight figure swayed wildly in the saddle, and Colonel Gray, with a muttered exclamation, was rushing after her, his lips set, when the end came. Dare Devil had flown straight for a five-barred gate. His hoof caught on the upper bar, he was down, a dark brown heap on the frosty grass, and at a little distance the figure in the green habit lay very still. Far in the distance the hunt swept on. The soldier knelt beside her and raised her head. It fell on his arm, and a few men drew near, silent and appalled. Amongst them was a retired Indian army surgeon.

"Dr. Grove, is Dr. Grove there?"

They gathered round, and the doctor dismounted and bent over the white face. It looked very small and white against the colonel's sleeve. Colonel Gray raised his eyes. "Any hope of life?"

"No; she is dead."

Roger, far ahead with Miss Venne, was not reached till the fox was run to earth. Cecily had been carried home then. The house

party melted away, and the vicar came, bowed and pale, and sorrowful exceedingly.

He thought Roger strangely calm, but men show sorrow differently, and he suspected nothing. Cecily had let him see nothing. Might he take her home, to the village God's acre? And Roger agreed.

*"A wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more."* Cecily's place knew her no more. The great and the good and the famous go, and the world sweeps on, after only the briefest of pause. It is the law of life; but the pathetic evanescence of all earthly things is none the less strange and sad.

Roger married Henrietta Venne within the year, as every one knew he would. Only the vicar shivered a little as he heard, and after that seemed older very much. But he had no idea at all of the quiet tragedy of his little girl's life; no one had. He only thought how soon she was forgotten.

And yet he felt as if she were all his, once more—his only. Roger Markham had a second wife, and was now equally yoked, and, we presume, happy. But there was no second child for Mr. Maynard. Only there was Cecily waiting for him in Paradise. Perhaps he rejoiced a little that there was no marriage or giving in marriage, and no going away.

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### "Died in Harness."

By F. B. FORESTER.

"YOU may live ten, twenty, thirty years yet—with care. But any sudden shock, any excessive exertion, will be the death of you. . . ."

The man—he was a young man, as years go, two or three and thirty—halted in the street outside the doctor's house and glanced back, with an odd calm intentness of look and attitude, at the dull wire-blinded windows behind which the words had been spoken.

What was it the doctor had said? He pressed his hand to his forehead and repeated the curt briskly-spoken phrases over and over again to himself; at first with nothing beyond the

vague dull iteration of a man seeking to impress upon his memory something that he would not let slip; then with a sudden eager consciousness that the point in question was his own affair, intimately connected with himself, bound up with his very life; finally, with an ever increasing sense of wild, intoxicating delight.

Delight, nothing less. For the man was one of those to whom the thought of a long-deferred, slow, possibly lingering, death is nothing short of unrelenting torture.

It had been always so with him. Since the earliest days of his recollection, from the time that he, a boy of ten, had lain on the rug before the library fire in his father's house, intent on Kingsley's noblest romance, when the words, "a straw death, a cow's death," had first made their meaning clear to him, the thought of a long delayed, lingering death had been his dread. Later, when the library and all implied thereby, had vanished into the far-reaching vistas of the past, had gone only to form part of that phantom gallery of shadowy recollections which memory stores up for every one of us, and from which, now and again, she lifts the dust-covered draperies of the shrouding years to bring to our wondering, scarce recognizing eyes one glimpse of the long ago, it had been just the same. That haunting thought of the failing faculties of body and mind, the dread of finding himself passed and distanced in the race, compelled to quit the busy thronged highway for the lonely seclusion of some retreat to lie down and die in, had grown upon him; and as week by week, day by day, he slipped lower down the social ladder and, wearied and weakened by the world's incessant buffeting, felt his yielding fingers loosen their grip perceptibly, bringing him nearer and nearer to the hideous, hopeless slough at its foot, the idea of a lonely old age, of an end without hope or cheer, had increased to a waking nightmare. He was one of those on whom the increasing pessimism of these last decades had laid an irresistible grasp: in him there was no vestige of the bright, confident optimism which sees in evil only the matrix of the good, the dross which must be burnt away to bring to sight and leave visible the pure and precious gold. The sin and the suffering, the terror and pain, and the intense pathos of life, were alike terrible to him. He could not see, and had not faith enough to believe in any end which could be served thereby—



only the thought, then an almost certainty, of faltering and failing some day, near or distant, of falling in the track and feeling the wild, mad rush of the eager crowd sweep over him in the breathless race for wealth and fame, had grown to be part of his life. . . .

And now that dread was past, that terror removed. Come soon or come late the end itself would be short, of that he was certain. Life had not showed itself to be such a flower-besprinkled pathway as to put beyond question the possibility of a sudden shock coming to him: and he turned away from the doctor's house a doomed, yet thankful, man, the words that would have struck cold terror to the hearts of most men bringing only joy to his.

He turned away out of the less noisy street to find himself in the very centre of the seething whirlpool of life. A few paces distant, across the crowded thoroughfare, a small crowd caught his attention. The incident causing it was no uncommon one, only a horse down in the shafts of a hansom. But when the harness had been slackened, and the bystanders, drawing back, had cleared a space to allow the prostrate brute to rise, the inducements of word and whip alike failed to produce effort or movement, and a murmur of astonishment went round among the onlookers. The horse was dead. There he lay in the sunlight, stark and gaunt, the glazing eye turned up to the blue heaven, the breeze ruffling the glossy mane, but dead, dead, dead. Even the careless onlookers, rendered callous by the frequent occurrence of accidents of this nature, were touched by the somewhat uncommon ending to the one before them.

"Blessed if I know'd there was anything amiss wi' 'im," Despard heard the driver say with that peculiar resentful intonation by which some natures are wont to express their railings against fate. "Took his feed like a Christian, he did, this very mornin'. Sixty pounds the boss give for him three months come Monday, and he was the best 'oss in the lot. An' what's he wuth now? Cat's meat!"

He gave the carcass a half-contemptuous, half-pitying kick as he spoke.

"Died in harness he has, poor brute, at any rate," Despard heard another man say, who seemed capable of recognizing and looking at the secondary aspect of things.

"Ah, just so. Wery fine for you to talk, as ain't got to make your living by 'im," retorted the driver viciously. "Dying in 'arness may sound wery well, but it's live brutes we wants there, not dead uns. Them's the ones for our money. Nice job for me to 'ave to tell the boss as the Doctor's dropped a dead corp in the shafts, ain't it? Died in 'arness! Garn!" he wound up with a snarl.

Despard turned and walked away. But the words he had heard haunted him; somehow he could not get them out of his head.

"Died in harness," he muttered to himself. "It's the best dcath after all. . . . Well, I've neither asked nor received a great deal in life, and this one thing may be granted me, who knows? May a death in harness be the one for me!"

A man is made or marred by the woman he marries, so runs the saying, and the former had been the case with Paul Despard. It would almost have seemed that Fate had in a sense relented, had decreed that since his days were in a sense numbered, they should at all events glide away in peace, that before the eventide it should be light. Things had become easier for him of late: the billows of life had ceased to give him such rude buffets, he had got into smoother water, and, like every other mortal at least once in this world, he had known what it was to be happy. As a lover, he had learned what joy meant; happiness, when he found himself a husband; but the meaning of blessedness never came to him until he knew that he was a father, and realized that the frail, helpless infant in his wife's arms was a possession which every law of God and man alike declared to belong to these two of them alone. There was something to live for now: something to think and work for with every waking morning, to rejoice over with thankful gratitude every happy night. Life was no longer a great empty void, nor the world a waste, tenanted by malignant beings all conspiring to work him mischief, since these two had come into it; and the old haunting dread found little standing ground now. . . . Yet the prayer had been heard and registered.

One night, a stormy evening at the close of November, Despard was on his way home. He had fully a mile to walk from the outskirts of the town before the welcoming light of his little cottage shone out suddenly as he rounded the angle of the hill,

beyond which, not a quarter of a mile distant, the railway embankment broke the formerly level line of the horizon. It had been an unsightly object once, this embankment, an ugly upheaval of *débris*, of scattered fragments in the midst of the fair and smiling landscape, but less so now, for Nature is long-suffering, and speedily flings a veil of tenderest green over the unsightly scars with which her ungrateful children so often repay her bounties to themselves.

He walked as briskly as the wind would let him, whistling cheerily to himself, for his thoughts were bright ones. Those who remembered seeing and speaking to him that night testified later that they had never seen him in better spirits, and his buoyant "Good-night" as he left the office lived long afterwards in the memory of the doorkeeper. "Puir lad, I doot he was fey," the old Scot would add, with a shake of the head, when recalling to interested listeners the incidents of that never-to-be-forgotten night.

Ere long Despard had left the town behind, and entered the more open country. He loved fresh air and freedom, and willingly accepted the long walk backwards and forwards to his work, for the sake of the sense of space and the pure breath of the rushing wind round his cottage home. There was wind enough abroad to-night. Even in the town slates and chimney-pots had been unceremoniously dislodged, and hoardings that had stood the stress of last winter's storms had succumbed at last. Out in the country, with little available protection, and no shelter of any kind, things were far worse. Hard work struggling along in the teeth of the gale, with what sounded like the strife of the powers of the air raging in the tormented tree-tops above him, as with bent head and shoulders bowed before the storm he forced his way onward. Dangerous work, too, for the oaks were yet heavy with leaves, and offered resistance to the progress of the storm, to their own destruction.

"Ah!" He stopped dead, with a sudden tightening of the breath. Half-a-dozen steps in the rear a huge tree, torn by the roots from its stronghold, had gone crashing earthwards, and the force of the concussion had well-nigh deafened him.

"A near shave for me," muttered Paul, with a quick-drawn breath of thankful relief, as he braced himself once more to force his way forward.

Ahead of him lay the village, distant a mile or so beyond the spot he was now approaching, a deep gully parting two opposing shoulders of high ground and spanned by the piers of an antiquated wooden viaduct. One might have fancied that some huge unknown monster, beside which the most gigantic reptile belonging to prehistoric periods would have appeared dwarfed a thousand times, had chosen that lonely deserted spot between the two opposing hills for a grave, and that the carcass, slowly decaying, had left the enormous backbone alone visible in the shape of the gigantic skeleton fabric spanning the valley between.

"The old bridge will feel the strain to-night," thought Despard, and he was right.

Confined in the narrow gully between the challenging outposts of rock the wind swept to meet him with the force of a hurricane. It fairly lifted him once, it drove him back staggering again and again, and flew past him shrieking its triumph in his tingling ears; but that was all. Physically, man may be at the mercy of wind and wave, yet he makes them in their turn the puppets of his will.

"There goes another tree," muttered Paul, as a crash that shook the ground sounded again in his ears.

Was it a tree, though? No, surely. No tree of any size grew in such close proximity to the viaduct. He knew what it must be, as, even before the hideous tumult had died into silence, he turned his eager face up to the huge fabric above, and saw the fatal yawning gap visible in its level length. How the wind-demon shrieked and exulted in a tumult of ecstasy as he swept again and again in triumphant joy through the hideous and gaping rent, screaming in shrill unholy glee at the prospect of a swift and sure revenge on the mortals who had dared to oppose a barrier like that in the path of his former unchecked triumphs.

"Revenge! revenge!" shrieked the Wind Spirit, tearing frantically at the piles of the still standing piers. "Ha! ha! it is close at hand, it is coming nearer. A hundred lives are mine to-night."

"Are they?" Paul Despard said between his teeth, answering the quick succession of thoughts flashing through his brain. "Not this time!" . . . .

. . . . A hard struggle, and for him a terrible strain, wrestling with the storm, fighting against it in the endeavour to climb the

steep embankment and reach the outlying signal box that stood barely a stone's-throw from the viaduct. He was gasping when he reached it, guided by the light which streamed out in a ruddy flare to meet him. It flickered and wavered strangely to-night, surely. But the rush of the wind would account for that.

"Parsons!" he shouted with all the breath he had left, but Parsons evidently did not hear. No wonder, in that deafening tumult; and Despard sprang at the door. It yielded to his wrench, flew open, and he stood in the signal box. . . .

God in Heaven! had the powers of the air been given all their own way to-night? On the floor lay the signalman, unconscious, the boards stained with the blood that had oozed from a ghastly cut on his head, the flaring light of the lamps shining on the glass bestrewing the floor from the broken casement, which, blown in by the violence of the gale, in itself offered all the explanation that was needed.

Despard looked, understood, and his lips tightened curiously as he stepped forward and bent down over the helpless man on the floor of the cabin. He had his choice given him in that moment, and he knew it. . . . Life and love on the one hand—on the other, duty and death!

Yet it must have been a bitter struggle for him! The duty of the man, and the instinct of the husband and father, waged sore battle within him then. . . . So little time was left, too; the lives of a hundred passengers in the night express hung on the exertions of the next few minutes, and telegraph and signals alike were as a sealed book to him. Yet he did not remain inactive. The signalman declared afterwards that a faint recollection of a voice shouting in his ear, in a frantic endeavour to reach and rouse the slumbering consciousness, had come to him; and the signs left around bore their silent witness to the desperate attempts made by Despard to restore the man's senses, before, desisting from his fruitless endeavours, he stood up to realize that the task and the responsibility had come upon himself alone. Pity that but a broken reed held in its keeping the issues of life and death!

He had his battle to fight over again, even in spite of the stern resolve he had taken to his heart. However loud and clear may be the trumpet call of duty, there are a hundred mocking echoes ever ready to blend its tones with theirs, and to every man

is not given the perfect attunation of ear to distinguish unfalteringly between the false and the true.

"Who is to blame or judge you?" whispered a tempting voice in his ear. "The bridge was standing when you passed—if questioned, you have only to say that, and who is to doubt your word, or to be one whit the wiser? Remember what the doctor told you, and don't be a fool! Go home to your wife and child, hold your tongue, and let the night express look out for itself."

And to that the brave gallant heart of the man, rising up in indignant protest, made answer: "No! The lives of these passengers have been given into my hand, and with God's help I'll fulfil the trust."

. . . . Did a vision of the face of his young wife, listening in anxious expectation for the step of the husband on whom, living, she had looked her last, for the voice which should never more sound in her ears, rise up before him then? For one brief moment he looked wistfully back, on life and love and happiness, and then between himself and the blissful vision rushed the shadowy form of the night express, with its scores of unconscious passengers, thundering on through the inky darkness of that night of storm, to the fate awaiting it at the Romney Bridge. With a white, set face, but a firm, unfaltering step, he crossed to the door, flung it open, descended the steps, and sprang out upon the line, sending his heart in one brief fervent prayer upwards before he braced himself to the task, which, bringing life and safety to others, could bring to him one thing only—death.

We scoff at faith in these days, faith in man at least, and some of us—God help us—at faith in any Higher Power. Yet we all have it, every one: we prove that every night we lie down to rest, each day that we go forth to take our part in the world's work. Despard was man enough to have faith in men; and he gave his wife and child in charge to those whose lives and credit he knew he was giving his own life to save, as, calling on every energy of mind and body to stand to him now, he nerved himself to the fatal work, and sped with flying footsteps along the line. And right nobly was the trust responded to, as the widow and child, amply provided for by a grateful company, could tell in after days. Nay, more, the solid structure of brick and stone which, in twenty shapely arches, now spans the gully between



the sister hills, will go down to history by the name of—no longer the Romney—but the Despard Bridge.

Half a mile, at the very least, and barely seven minutes to do it in! And all the time with the demon wind clutching at him, driving him back, tearing the breath from the pallid lips, shrieking in his ears in shrill-voiced, despairing fury, as if recognizing its own impotence before the will of a determined man. Could he trust himself to carry the work through? Would the panting, straining heart, already taxed to its utmost, hold out long enough, enable him to reach the spot, somewhere beyond the darkness hanging over the bars of parallel steel that stretched like white serpents away ahead of him, where, a quarter of a mile outside the station, the next signal box stood?

The lurid light at last, flashing out across the line! To shout against the wind would have been useless, even had he not needed all his breath, had not every energy been strained to its utmost in the desperate endeavour to stave off the grip of the resistless fingers that he could feel already clutching at his heart. Yet if will power, the stern determination of a resolute purpose could keep death at bay till the work was done, it should do it now!

"God! let it not be all in vain," gasped Despard as, nerving himself for one last effort, he sprang up the steps of the signal box.

The roar of the wind had drowned all sound of approaching footsteps, and the signalman started and stared at the sudden apparition of a wild storm-tossed figure, with ghastly haggard face and strained starting eyes.

"The express! Stop her! Romney Bridge down!"

They were all the words the blue trembling lips could falter out, and the speaker staggered as he spoke and leant heavily against the wall.

Far in the distance, even through the roar of the wind, could be heard the low dull thunder of the approaching train. "Line clear!" had been the last signal from the Romney box; and passing swiftly through the station and leaving its lights behind her, in complete unconsciousness of the waiting grave yawning a mile beyond, the express got her steam up and gathered speed again for her swift race to the north. Nearer and nearer . . . and then the red danger signal flashing out into the darkness

sends a quivering shock pulsating along the great throbbing line of life: and the passengers, roused and startled by the sudden and unlooked-for slowing, begin to wonder and to question at its cause. "We oughtn't to stop here, Jack, ought we?" asks the golden-haired bride of the honeymoon couple in the *coupé* next the engine, with that complete confidence in the omniscience of the young husband beside her, characteristic of the wife of twenty-four hours old.

Ay, stroke the golden hair, and smile, as you tell her it is all right . . . you little know how those eyes, how that face, which is all the world to you now, *might* have looked only one short quarter of an hour hence . . . And next day, when the news comes to you and you know the truth, think, as you are a man, of yon weeping widow in the lonely cottage by the ruined bridge, to whom the redemption of your love and happiness has brought only tears and sorrow and the grim dark shadow of death.

A smile, such as must have shone on the face of the Theban hero, gazing down from the height of Mantinea, where he lay with the death agony on him, at the flying Spartans below—on that of Von Winkelried, had he been permitted to witness the wedge-like cleaving of the phalanx in which he himself had made the first reft—hovered on Despard's lips as he listened to the well-known sound, and knew that the express was slackening speed—the smile of a man who has seen his work, and to whom it has been given to know that it has been well done. Let the end come now—he had played his part.

"Jim," he said distinctly, but with a strange unearthly ring in his voice. "I've dealt fair by the Co.—tell the Co. to deal fair by me. My—my wife . . ."

But when the signalman, wondering at the sudden silence, looked round to answer him, no answer was needed. Of the two beneath the roof of that signal box, one alone was a living man. Paul Despard had had his wish. He had died in harness.

## Prodigies and Portents of Ancient Days.

THE amazing credulity and superstition of old days seems to have reached its maximum in the time of Charles II., or thereabouts. To the abundant stock of both long possessed by the English had been added, through the influence of the Stuarts and their Scotch followers, a certain amount peculiar to Scotland, especially the belief in witchcraft. The grand and stirring events of the middle of the seventeenth century and the movements of large bodies of soldiery, animated by a sincere and exalted, yet most fanatical and small-minded spirit of religion, must have heightened the popular belief in signs and portents to an extent hard now to realize.

This man saw the finger of God in the execution of the king; that one in the premature death of the great Protector. To one the unprecedented position gained for England amongst the nations by the genius of Cromwell was a fitting reward to the "saints" and their party, whilst to another the Great Plague, followed so soon by the Fire, was a judgment upon a country which had slain its king and poured out blood like water.

Amidst such a ferment of men's minds it is not surprising that an extraordinary book termed the "Mirabilis Annus, or The Year of Prodigies and Wonders, being a faithful and impartial Collection of several Signs that have been seen in the Heavens, in the Earth, and in the Waters," should have made its appearance. The title-page, upon which no author's name appears, goes on to proclaim that these are now "made publick for a seasonable Warning to the People of these three Kingdoms speedily to repent and turn to the Lord, whose hand is lifted up amongst us." After a long and tedious preface, much after the style of Hugh Peters' sermons to the army, the anonymous writer plunges into a list of "Several Prodigies and Apparitions" seen in the heavens from August 1, 1660, to the latter end of May, 1661. Many of these consist of the well-known phenomena called "parhelioi" or "double suns," but the conclusions drawn from them and the allusions to what happened after

previous similar appearances, are often more curious than the events themselves. Plenty of other signs and wonders can have been nothing more than shooting-stars, whilst others were as plainly ærolites or meteoric stones. The author's wonderful deductions and "parallels" from what occurred, and his boundless faith in the narrators, are rather pleasant in these days when few believe much in anything outside their own experience. The first "prodigie" was the appearance of two suns to some reapers near Hertford. Two suns, it seems, "do naturally portend much moisture and rainy weather. But God ordaines them (as some learned men conceive) to signifie severall judgments, as War, Famine and Pestilence. Some do affirm they portend the fall of Great Men from their power, who rule with pride and disdain. They do also signifie disturbances and innovations in matters of Religion." Accordingly, there were two suns seen in England at one time, shining at a good distance from each other, at the beginning of Queen Mary's reign. Even three suns were seen at a time at Kingston-on-Thames, May 14, 1661; one of a blood-red colour, another half blood-red and half like silver, the true sun being No. 3, who, as he rose in his splendour, put the intruders to flight. This sight had occurred at Rome just before the contention of Galba, Otho and Vitellius for the empire; in Germany in 1541. "about which time Popery was rejected in the Palatinate," and in this country not long before the battle of Dunbar (September 3, 1650). Five suns, however, were seen here in 1233, "after which followed so Great a Dearth that many People were constrained to eat hors-flesh and barks of Trees." On the continent this would have been rather looked down on, for at Dantzic, in 1660, seven suns were seen all at once by "a Person of Quality and Ingenuity." As to the latter virtue there can be no doubt, for he thinks he might have seen nine if he had been a little sooner, "as he could well discern the footsteps of two more." Three of the spurious luminaries were white and three coloured, and amongst them was seen to pass a white cross, "which was very notable and wonderfull to behold, near an hour and a half." How far sheer "ingenuity" and how far the celebrated spruce beer of Dantzic (if it was then invented) were at the bottom of this yarn it is impossible now to determine. A fine lunar rainbow was seen from near "the New Artillery ground between 11 and 12 of the clock at night, October 5, 1660,

the meaning and import whereof the Lord may in due time discover."

A few days after the rainbow the inhabitants of Wood Street, City, saw, or thought they saw, about 4 p.m., "a fiery Meteor in the form of a Ship-streamer, or, as others apprehended, of a Beesome with the great end foremost; it passed with a very swift motion from West to East." Immediately upon it followed another meteor of the same shape, but not of the same "bignesse." The parallel drawn is that "a prodigious sign in this Form appeared, Anno 1550, when the persecution began to wax hot in Scotland against the professors of the Truth."

Prodigy No. 10 is to the effect that at Shenley, in Hertfordshire, being the day (Oct. 17, 1660) whereon Colonel Scroope, Colonel Jones and others were executed at Charing Cross, there "was seen in the Aire towards the Evening the appearance of five naked men, exceeding bright and glorious," moving very swiftly. The report of this was received from "an Eye-witness, who is not in the least suspected to be a Phanatique." The dismembered quarters of the unfortunate colonels being set up on Aldgate and Bishopsgate, a bright star was seen over the former, and seven pillars of smoke over the latter, "reaching up towards Heaven as high as the beholders could well discern." It is evident the writer's sympathies were with the victims, whose only fault was that many years before they had signed the death warrant of Charles I.

After this comes a curious account of a splendid meteor seen about three or four o'clock in the morning, October 30, 1660. It was observed from places so far apart as High Wycombe, Bucks., and at Harleston, in Norfolk; also in Hertfordshire and in London. In the latter case "two persons of credit who live near Pickadilla, going over the Field by the Pall-Mall" heard a noise in the air as if a pound of gunpowder had been fired, and looking up saw a body of fire bigger than the moon. To some of the Hertfordshire worthies this body of fire "presently turn'd into the perfect form of a Dragon, and by the fall of it the Earth was so lightened that they could have seen a penny upon the ground." To others, however, it "rose up again into the Aire with a Tayl about a Pole long, and went Eastwards, where at last it fixed itself in the Sky like a Star." In this case the parallel is somewhat feeble, being merely to the effect that a

similar star was seen in A.D. 389, "a little before the Scots and the Picts invaded Brittain." The same or a similar star was seen about a week after its first appearance, from "Spittlefields." Viewed through a "Prospective Glasse" it appeared of three several colours, one part "blewish like the flaming of Brimston," the middle clear and bright, whilst the remainder was like the "Flame of a smoaking fire." This was about 7 A.M., but a little earlier this ill-regulated object appeared to a couple of wayfarers as two stars fighting with each other, and seeming to throw down streams of fire and of blood respectively, "as if it had been poured out of a Payl."

The very ancient and widely-spread belief in contending armies being seen in the skies received much confirmation in the "*Mirabilis Annus*" in question, and furnishes the compiler of this quaint old record with a whole series of parallels and sententious comments. In one instance it appears that "several credible persons" of Horsham, riding very early through Smitham Bottom (the long valley just south of Croydon), suddenly saw "a very great Light, and the Hill on their left hand appeared as if it had been all on a Flame;" this light soon divided into two, in which there seemed to be two distinct armies engaging each other. "They beheld them in this posture a considerable time till at last there fell an exceeding thick Fog, which made it very dark, and the smell of the Fog was as the smell of Gunpowder." As a sequel we are reminded that similar portents have often occurred, "and the Events have alwaies been very signall and remarkable." Such a sign was seen before the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, and before the battle of "Agen-Court," whilst "we ourselves also in England have of late times known this kind of Apparition and by too sad experience felt the meaning of it." This alludes of course to the Civil Wars, prior to which, in 1640, armies fighting in the heavens were repeatedly seen in "divers places by many discreet persons of Quality." The contentiousness of the time, however, was by no means confined to pugnacious stars and phantom armies. The very clouds fell out with each other, for "a person of honesty and discretion" being called by his children to listen to a strange noise in the air, heard a rushing sound like hail coming from a black cloud towards the north, the sky being perfectly clear elsewhere. Presently came the sound of a drum beating in the cloud, followed by the report of "great and small



Guns," after which there appeared many small clouds "which flying swiftly every way did smite and dash one against another." The sound of drums and firing continued as the man returned to his house, but it seems unlikely it was anything more out of the way than a common thunderstorm. It appears that something similar happened in Austria in 1621, and not long after, near the places where these noises were heard, "very bloody Skirmishes and Fights were between the Swedes and the Imperialists." In some cases these signs were a little premature, for in October, 1658, the sound of drums and guns was heard in the air in the flat country between Hull and the sea, but no war followed for nearly seven years.

A good many of the amazing things people saw in the sky in those days seem to have been merely clouds of fantastic shape, but they attached great importance to these accidental resemblances, and their superstitious and ignorant minds dwelt upon them to an extent bordering sometimes upon insanity. Some worthy folks at Leighton-Buzzard saw in the air the likeness of a May-pole, sometimes straight and sometimes twisting like a worm. After half-an-hour of these freaks "there arose a smoak," and from that fire, which suddenly seized upon and consumed the ridiculous May-pole. At the same time (May 24, 1660) and place others saw a cloud, which after performing the feat of changing from a sword into a church steeple upside down, quickly divided and "one part of it with an incredible swiftnesse did fly away from the other." The portion thus abandoned formed into "the likenesse of a mill-wheele with Coggs, and did turn round with a very swift motion, upon which there seemed to fall down dead men spreading their Arms and Legs; also there fell the quarters of men's bodies, as likewise the shape of dogs." Having delivered itself of the arms, legs and dogs, the cloud became very white and was good enough to cease turning round; much to the relief of the spectators, no doubt. During the month of September, 1661, "some persons of known discretion and credit in the East part of Sussex saw an Apparition of Clouds in the air," of various colours and moving swiftly before a strong wind. After the passing away of the clouds, towards the east, there appeared the likeness of three pulpits, each having over it a canopy or sounding-board "with Pinacles." In each pulpit was the form of a man with a black cap on his head.

Presently there appeared a number of armed men, the pulpit doors were thrown open and the preachers were forced out. Soon a couple of carts and horses came along, each dragging two men on the edge of a cloud. After this a storm of thunder and lightning compelled the spectators to give up their absorbing occupation of gaping up at the sky in a way which seems to suggest that people had very little to do in those days and plenty of time to do it in. In this case the Act of Uniformity, passed in 1662, is clearly alluded to ; so clearly indeed that one would be inclined to suspect it was passed before the story of the "Apparition of Clouds" was concocted. By this Act, as is well known, Charles II., with the faithlessness inherent in his family, violated all the promises of religious toleration with which he began his reign.

The narrator of one of the marvellous tales of this "faithful and impartial collection" was obviously the victim of a hoax. One Allen, a scholar of Magdalen College, Oxford, hearing in the night a noise as of geese hissing, got up and looked out of the window. Seeing no geese he was going back to bed when he saw "a man grovelling upon the floor, in his Pontificalibus, attired like a Bishop in Lawn sleeves." On adjuring it to speak, the "Spectrum" rose up and approached the bed, at which the young man was "exceeding terrified, and calling out 'murder, murder,' it vanished." The next night five or six scholars watched in the room, and about midnight the candles were suddenly extinguished, and a great noise was heard as of children crying out. On this the bold watchers ran pell-mell out of the chamber, but whether to have a hearty laugh or what is not stated. The freshman, as Mr. Allen no doubt was, at the request of the sub-president kept the matter quiet ; that is, he only confided it to some special friends. In spite of the absurdity of this story, a parallel is gravely given to the effect that the devil (as the bishop was supposed to be) appeared at Danebury Church, in Essex, in 1402, in the likeness of "a Gray or White Fryar, extremely affrighted the people and did great hurt to the Chancell and Steeple." Possibly in the hope of catching His Majesty amongst them, several of these gray or white friars were soon after hanged or beheaded for treason.

The prodigies and portents which happened on the earth in the remarkable years 1660-1, were somewhat less varied than

those which occurred in the sky, but were sufficiently curious all the same. Earthquakes and sudden rains, either of the usual kind or of various singular objects, form the staple of this second division of the Collection. As to the first-named, "according to the opinion of Philosophers, the Pestilence in a natural way is the Common and Ordinary effect of Earthquakes," although they seem also to have been highly conducive to rebellion. In April, 1661, there fell at Spalding and Bourne, in South Lincolnshire, a quantity of grains of wheat; this had also been observed some twenty years before at Bridgnorth, by Baxter, the eminent Nonconformist. White ashes fell at Chesterfield in 1660, in sufficient quantity to whiten the fields like snow. Much less pleasant things came down occasionally, however, in those remarkable times. At Beverley, for instance, "an innumerable company of Frogs and Toads reigned out of the Air" on August 28, 1660, and a few days later, at Bury St. Edmunds, a number of reddish spiders were observed in the middle of Broad Street. "They marched together in a strange kind of order" to the house of a Mr. Duncombe, where they proceeded to spin a great web between two large posts before the door. Some of the enterprising spiders proceeded under the door into the house, but those in the web were destroyed by igniting straw under them. As "a great swarm of flies" was seen in the town the same day, numerous enough to darken the sky, it is clear that the spiders were only following their lawful prey, but Mr. Duncombe (an ex M.P.) was quite convinced that they were sent to his house by the witches. 'Besides frogs, toads and spiders, as just related, there was a fall of "multitudes of meddow-mice" in Norfolk, so plentiful that it was difficult to avoid treading upon them. A Mr. Spelman said they had eaten as much grass as used to keep 130 fat cattle, and he also feared he should be "damnified by them £300 in a field of Cole-seed." A delightfully naive parallel is drawn from a similar visitation at Southminster, Essex, in 1580, in that "the following year Queen Elizabeth was much disturbed with Jesuites, of which severall were executed."

Amongst other evil doings of the animal creation, "two great Hogs came two severall and very strange unusual wayes up divers steps into the Cathedrall" at Canterbury, whilst the service was being held. The same thing having occurred in 1641, "a little before the downfall of the Hierarchy," this not very alarm-

ing event is merely noted as "Malum Omen." In October, 1661, a Mr. Martin, of Devonshire, walking in his grounds, was attacked by two ferocious ravens, who attempted to pick out his eyes. Throwing a stone at them, he immediately felt great pain in the arm used. He went home, got worse and worse, and just before he died "the Bell in the Steeple tolled three hours together of its own accord," but ceased as soon as the breath was out of his body. This, the account adds, "is most certainly true," so we *must* believe it on such indisputable authority!

The examples of signs and wonders seen in the waters are but few and mostly consist of abnormal tides in the Thames, and of the sudden drying-up or appearance of springs and streams. The "River Oouse," near Bedford, stood still and divided itself on each side, so that people could walk in the bed of it for three miles, in 1399 and 1443. This was thought to forebode the "civil broyles" between the Houses of York and Lancaster, which happened not long after.

Lastly, in Craven, in Yorkshire, according to a very credible person, "six Coach-horses were seen, drawing a Coach first down and then up the River, with very great fierceness."

It seems so utterly impossible to conjecture what can have given rise to this last delusion (unless the "Person of Ingenuity" from Dantzic was exercising his undoubted talent in the neighbourhood), that it will be best here to leave these veracious Chronicles to be believed or disbelieved according to the reader's fancy.

W. B. PALEY.

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## 3f a Man ask Bread.

BY MARY S. HANCOCK.

### CHAPTER X.

JEANNIE DINWOODIE sat by her peat fire in a remarkably brown study. She had two fishers in the house, men who rented the river from Craigleith to Birdhope Crag, and whose rods even now ornamented the porch, and whose creels hung in the passage, the property of mighty experts with rod and line.

Not that the fishers themselves did too much harm to the river or to the fish.

They were fine, up-standing men of that discreet age that no longer runs about after tennis-balls, or finds personal allurements in cricket, so they had taken to fishing, and invested in big boots, and fishing stockings, and creels, and wonderful flies of all devices, and prodigious pocket-books, and rare descriptions of rods—all things at which the fish laughed merrily, if a fish *can* laugh, which is doubtful, and at which also the sly river-poacher, who hooked his salmon, grinned rejoicingly.

They could dispose comfortably of a twenty-pounder—or more, or less—with an every-day, commonplace rod and line, that had nothing patent or scientific about it, and even their flies were home-made affairs, to which Jeannie's best bonnet and its feathers contributed as often as not, and in which the barn-door fowl had their share. But they hooked the salmon, and "the proof of the pudding" is always known to be "in the eating." Nevertheless, the Minchester fishers were business men who wanted relaxation, and they found it on the banks of the river, or amidst the shallows thereof; and if they chose to pay expensively for their pleasure, why, as Jeannie Dinwoodie put it, "that is neither here nor there."

They caused a flutter of excitement at the inn; they helped in the freer circulation of money in the village, and they certainly assisted in replenishing Jeannie's coffers, though, on the whole, Jeannie behaved so well to them that they came to her year after year. They had come now, but it was at an inopportune moment in the annals of the inn, for the mistress was busy nursing a woman who lay upstairs in her own room, sick "nigh unto death."

It is well known that the poor are always good to the poor ; it is the "touch of nature that makes them wondrous kind," and Jeannie—who had her ups and downs—who was often engaged in warfare with the powers that be, because of her sympathy with poachers and others of that ilk, possessed—amongst other inconvenient things—a heart that was sensitive to the prayer of poverty or pain.

Rough, sturdy, ill-to-do-with as she might be "where she'd a mind," Jeannie was the very soul of kindness "where she *took*," and she had *taken* to the woman whom she was nursing.

"It's a ticklish job, I war'nt," she confided to her niece, "an arfu' ticklish job, an' they men-folks i' th' hoose an' a'; but I canna pit *hur* till th' door, no, nor wull I ; sae *they* maun just grin an' bide it."

"They'll mebbe nivor ken," said the niece, as she took up her knitting for a moment.

"Hoots ! They'll ken—ye kan trust 'em—an' mair, lass, gin she gits awa'."

"Oh, aye," said the other, with a nod of comprehension. "Gin she gits awa' there'll be nae hidin' proceedin's."

Jeannie shook her head woefully. "I doot she'll be gangin' throo the neet ; she'll be awa' afore the morn's morn."

"Do ye say sae ? That's sune." The girl turned her stocking meditatively. "Ye'll hae ter tell 'em," she murmured presently in a lower tone ; but Jeannie coughed doubtfully.

"It's a bit ark'ard, ye ken," she began.

The niece assented silently.

"Gin folks come speirin' roond I'll no be able fur ter howld ma tongue."

"Theer's nowt ter hide," said the niece firmly ; "I reckon th' truth's safest when ye'll lose nuthin' by the tellin' on't."

"That's richt, but——" There came a long pause, and at the end of it Jeannie leaned over towards her niece.

"She's aye talkin', an' talkin', ye ken ; an' speirin' efter sum on 'em. I'm thinkin' I'll just be gettin' ane o' th' fishers ter spake till her th' neet ; t'will paicify her, nae doot, an' she needs it, puir sowl."

The niece's knitting fell to her knee.

"Did she speir fur th' fishers ?"

Jeannie made a gesture of dissent.



"Then what fur wull ye tribble thim?"

"She winna dee 'ithoot a wurrd."

"Theer's nayther on 'em meenisters, nor priests."

"They're gude-leevin' men-boddies," retorted Jeannie almost angrily. "An' I'm nane sae righteous mesel'; I cudna' tak' it upo' mesel' ter lead anither boddy oot o' this warrld till th' geates o' th' nixt."

"Gin rael gudeness o' hairt coonts fur sum'at, ye're no sae fair ahint," said the niece, who ought to have known.

But Jeannie shook her head.

"Na, na; let me be, lass; I'm nane sae gude as I micht be, I doot; but *she* maun ha' sumboddy, an' there's ne'er a cratur ter gang fur th' pairson."

"I'll gang."

"Ye!"

"A shure I wull—cannily."

Jeannie was obviously relieved.

"Gin ye'll gang I'll be rare an' obleeged, fur it's ill i' her min' she is, and I'd fain hae her comf'ble afore she sets aff."

The niece threw a plaidie over her shoulders and settled a "deerstalker" on her head.

"I'se awa'," she muttered, as she lifted the latch and sped into the growing darkness outside. She was moor-bred, moor-reared, and knew every tussock and every whin-bush this side of the village. She went straight as the crow flies, picking by instinct the tracks made by the pattering feet of sheep, and in three quarters of an hour by the inn clock, at her rate of movement, she ought to have brought back the "priest," for Jeannie belonged to the "Establishment," and would only have dealings with its clergy, known to her, as to the dale, as the "priest."

Jeannie was a firm partisan of Church and State, though she never attended the former and would willingly have defrauded the other. But she clung to the few traditions left as an only legacy by her mother, whose sole friend on earth had been a "priest;" and, whatever else she might be, Jeannie was loyal to the backbone.

"Thim as dis weel fur me an' mine thim I stand by," she said openly, and woe to the luckless wight who derided the Church in her presence.

"Hoots, mon," her chums would whisper in his ear. "Ken ye

no' that Jeannie woman has powerfu' han', and she's no way partic'lar whar she hits."

Thus it will be seen that Jeannie enforced her opinions, and made them respected, by sheer force of arms. And she put out her visitors one by one in readiness for the priest's coming by just opening the door of her bar-room and saying abruptly, without wasting time in politeness:

"Git oot o' here."

She had good lungs and a vigorous face.

She said again, "Git!"

And they "got," for every man took his cap and his plaid and made tracks without delay.

Thus did Jeannie prepare for the final dismissal of her other guest—the one that lay dying upstairs.

When the house was quiet and the fishers shut within their own sitting-room, Jeannie took a candle and mounted on high herself.

She put the light on a high chest of drawers, where it could not trouble the woman upon the bed, and then came and stood over her, arms akimbo.

"Is that you, Jeannie?"

A very thin hand came out from under the clothes and a very thin voice asked the question.

"Aye, it's mesel'; an' th' priest's comin'."

"God be thanked."

Jeannie began to stroke the hand, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I doot ye'll no be lang amangst us noo, hinny," she said with a touch of sorrow in her tones. "Ye'll be kennin' that yersel', mebbe."

The head on the pillow moved uneasily.

"Jeannie, when the finish comes it's painful."

"Aye."

"And there's a good deal still to be done——"

"Kape still, Meg, hinny; ye'll waste th' bit breath ye ha' laift. Eh, Meg, woman, I ha' seed ithers awa' afore the daay, an' I ha' greeted sair fur 'em."

"But they had lived their life, Jeannie."

"Aye, ye're ower young, I doot. Eh, ma hairt is sair fur ye."

No one below would have recognized the mistress of the inn as

she sat there stroking that thin hand and talking with such low, pathetic tones.

"And I've none of my own to come to me now," the girl was saying. "There's not one of them left. You are my friend to the last, Jeannie."

"Aye, I'm *that*," rejoined the innkeeper sturdily. "Dinna fret about freens, lassie."

"And I come back *here* as if it were home, Jeannie."

"Aye. It *is* yer hame, lassie. Dinna fash yersel' about it."

"Kiss me, Jeannie."

Both the thin arms went up and clasped the strong, dauntless woman round the neck.

"Kiss me, Jeannie."

But Jeannie folded her to her breast and held her like a mother would hold a tired bairn, close to a beating heart, in strong arms that never failed, that never knew weariness.

"I'm a very sinful girl, Jeannie," whispered the girl falteringly.

"Aye, we're a' that, bairn; we're a' ower muckle o' that."

"Jeannie, I am a sinner."

"Sinner or saint, it's the same ter me, honey. I'se no muckle mesel', an' I loe ye weel."

The girl lay quite still, and Jeannie kissed her very softly, once on her pale forehead, once on her pallid lips.

All the womanly tenderness that had been lying dormant beneath the surface rose within Jeannie's heart; she had not kissed any one for—how long? None had wanted her lips to touch them since—since when?

Jeannie could not remember.

Something very like a sigh followed the kisses, but it was smothered before the sick girl had time to hear it.

"And I'm nought o' kin to you, am I?" asked Meg, with a great wonder in her eyes. "Am I?"

"Ye're not; but ye ha' fa'en upo' troublous daays, that's a'. Tut, tut, lass; it's unco mickle as we can dae, ane fur t'other; but we canna shut oor hairts fra sorrow."

The girl's head nestled against the great broad shoulder. She was more than content.

"Gin I see the priest, I'll die happy," she murmured, lapsing into the dialect of her youth. "I am happy, Jeannie."

It was wonderful that the woman was not tired, so long she

had to sit there; but she was made of tough material, and she gave no sign of weariness.

This girl had caught at the softer side of her heart long ago, and Jeannie would have saved her from all that had come, had she been able. There are some things from which even our best friends cannot deliver us, but they are caused by our own self-will.

Neither by word or look had Jeannie once reproached her since she had returned; but the older woman well remembered her own warnings, uttered from the standpoint of a larger experience of human nature and worldly wisdom. It says much for Jeannie that she was so finely reticent, but, as she said: 'When a boddy's at the far end, whar's th' use o' makin' a hue an' cry?' She gave her sympathy instead—and a great love that lighted the lone pathway that Meg had to tread, and became, as Mr. Ruskin puts it, "endlessly merciful."

"Tell me, Jeannie," said the girl faintly, "tell me *why* you've done so much for me. What was there in me?" And Jeannie cleared her throat in a hurry.

"Ye wur ower liket fill ma brither that deed—that's a'. Him an' me were gey freens, ye ken; an'—an'——"

There was no need to add more, and Meg understood. She remained quite tranquilly for a moment or two, and then lifted her face to Jeannie's.

"Jeannie," she said, still more faintly, "I was—married—at Kirk Oswald to Rufus Gordon."

A wave of colour swept over the older woman's face as she bent and kissed the girl of her own accord.

"I kenned ye wud na err mair nor ye cud help," she returned quickly. "Deed, an' it's me as is glad ter hear that seame news, lassie. 'Tis a load liftet off ma mind."

Then there was quiet in the room until a sudden noise in the room below and a scraping of feet in the passage made it clear to Jeannie that the "priest" and her niece had returned together.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE man who was holding his hands over the blaze of Jeannie's fire was certainly not a "priest;" and yet he had accompanied the messenger back to the inn.

"Bide a while here, sir," said the girl—Jeannie's niece. "I'll

up an' tell my aunt that ye've comed." She hurried upwards, and as Jeannie came out of the room, they both met on the stair-head; Jeannie full of importance to greet the "priest" on his first visit to her house.

"Deed, but I cudna fin' him," said the niece in a clear whisper. "He weer awa' over the fell i' Jock Telfourd's trap to chreesten yon new infant o' Jock's. It is na thrivin', folks tell me."

"An' wha's this ye're bringin' i' his place? 'Twas twa pair o' shoon that I heerd, I reekin."

"Aye; I'm sayin'! Gin I heerd this fra th' priest's Nancy, I turnd me back. 'Woe's me,' ses I, 'I maun gang lane as I comed.' An' sae I did—till o' th' moor-eedge wha sud I see but the maister fra Redmairshall's sailf, walkin' o' th' heether. An', ses I, 'yon's a gude mon, an' a gude-leevin' mon; gin I canna hae th' priest, I'll hae *him*; an' th' priest can foller o' th' morn's morn.'"

"Did he come?" asked Jeannie, going directly to the point in her usual manner.

"Aye," replied the girl. "He's comed."

"Fetch him oop, then, lass; an' dinna fash me wi' yer 'she ses' and 'I ses.' Theer's clash enoo i' th' warld, I war'nt."

The girl turned and called softly down into the kitchen:

"Wud ye be plasin' ter coom, sir? The fleetin' boddy's oop the stair."

And Allan Gordon, rousing himself from his own sad thoughts, mounted at once in answer to the singular invitation.

Jeannie threw up her hands at the sight of him.

"'Twas *she* that wanted the priest, sor," she told him; "but I reckon Providence has sent *ye*. Yon's the wife o' Rufus Gordon, o' Redmairshall, wha was brither till ye; an' ma hairt greets, fur she's gangin' awa' ter th' 'bourne whence na traveller returns.'"

"The wife of Rufus!" said Allan in astonishment. "The wife of Rufus!" The rest of her harangue had gone into thin air. This one fact remained.

"Aye, yonder she is, and she's fleetin'!"

Allan strode up to the bed and looked down at the wasted form upon it.

"It is Meg," he said solemnly; "Meg, who was the keeper's daughter down at Birdhope."

Meg looked up at him and smiled.

"Aye," replied Jeannie from the rear, "ye're no wrang theer."

"And—Meg—the ghost of—Redmarshall—and Meg, wife—of—Rufus," said the pallid lips slowly, Allan bending low to hear.

He laid his hand on hers.

"Poor girl—poor Meg!" he said kindly. "Would to God I had known this before."

If Jeannie or Meg had dreaded his anger, all fear vanished now. Who indeed had known Allan other than gentle and kind and forbearing? He was very pitiful, very tender to Meg.

He sat down and held her hand, as Jeannie had done, and he talked—as the priest might have talked—quietly, seriously, of the great change, of all that lay before her.

"My little sister," he said, so lovingly that Jeannie's heart was melted, and she turned to the window to hide her sobs, while the tears ran down the thin cheeks of the dying girl.

"I've been ill for long," she confessed, "but Rufus could not see it; and—I—think—that room, you know—that hidden room, finished me off at the last. I came here—and that night—I broke a—bloodvessel. That was—the—end."

A fit of coughing interrupted her words, and when it was over Allan begged her not to exert herself.

"Let me do the talking," he said. "Dear, if I had only known all this, there would have been no hidden room for my brother's wife. You ought not to have been afraid of *me*, Meg. I was your brother, you know."

She smiled quietly.

She *had* feared him, even while she owned his goodness, and it had been part of Rufus' scheme to foster this feeling of dread.

It was quite dark outside, but Jeannie seemed to find plenty to occupy her attention at the window; suddenly, however, she bethought herself of the "fishing-gentlemen," and was hurrying away to look after them, when Meg's weak voice called her back.

"I have something—to—say," said the girl. "You—must—hear—it, lest—others—should get—the—blame—by-and-by. I wish Rob were—here—too."

"Whaat Rob?" queried Jeannie in wonderment; but Allan, who knew, said quietly:

"Rob, the policeman."



"Yes ; but—he'll—not—be—near."

"He'll no be fur off, trust him !" exclaimed Jeannie sharply.  
"He's aye prowlin' about, roond heer."

"I wish—he—were—in—this—room, then."

The girl's head moved uneasily ; she tossed to and fro. It was the restlessness that often heralds the end.

"I—killed—Rufus."

The words startled both listeners, falling in their clear sharpness upon the strained ears.

"It—was—an—accident. I only meant to frighten him, but he was—provoking. He rushed—at—me. There was a bit—of—a—struggle—and—the—thing—went—off. I did not mean to—do—it. And—and—I ran—away."

This was a revelation for which no one was prepared, and both Allan and Jeannie stood aghast.

"I—think—this—is—killing—me," wailed Meg plaintively.  
"Oh, Rufus—Rufus !" And her broken sobs were heartrending.

She had repented in dust and ashes, and she had loved Rufus Gordon in spite of all his wickedness and deceit.

"Even—Heaven—itself—will be shut against me, I doubt," she said, with a look into Allan's face. "I'm ower bad fur theer."

The look was an inquiry, and Allan shook off his horror at her deed.

"Ah," said he in his mind, "it was the ill-regulated sequel to an ill-regulated life. Sooner or later the end would have been tragic enough, I fear."

"Meg," he said, very gently, "there is no place where events will be judged more kindly—more forgivingly—than in Heaven. The One who will judge is One who also endured all the agonies and pains of this, our earth life. Look up, and seek forgiveness from the Cross, Meg. *There* hangs the world's atonement—forgiveness for our sins—pity for our failures—mercy for our shortcomings."

At this point the door closed softly—Jeannie had disappeared.

When she was seen, later in the evening, she told her niece that, in *her* opinion, the master of Redmarshall was equal to "ony priest"—at least in *this* particular case.

"He made *me* creep an' trimmle," she added slowly. "Aye, an' he tuk awa' a goodish bit o' ma concate. I'm no better nor I sud be, lassie."

"'Deed, an' that's the caase wi' a gude mony o' us'n," the girl replied heartily, as if she too were desirous of affording comfort in her way.

But Jeannie had received a severe shock in that room upstairs, and something else had made her "creep" besides Allan's words.

"Ter think o't," she said in the loneliness of the night-watch, which she shared with Allan. "Ter think this bit girl—this Meg—whom I ha' kenned sin' she wur that high, hes a mon's life upo' *her* han's! Sakes, they're ower free wi' fire-airms noo-a-daays. I' ma toime girls didna gae fur pistols an' the loike. They've na sheame i' these daays."

And when—at break of day, in the cold dawn, when the mists were just yielding to the touch of the first bright beams—the soul of the erring, straying, much-tempted Meg passed beyond the border-line of time, there came, with the release, the faintest feeling of relief to the heart of Jeannie Dinwoodie, as she glanced at Allan's bowed head. She seemed to have gained a great many intuitions that night.

She learnt something of this man's grand nature. She learnt something of his unaffected goodness, and she felt almost glad—almost *glad*—that with Meg the last dark cloud had gone from his horizon.

"The Lord bless thee, sor," she said very simply, as he shook her hand. "Aye, an' deal wi' thee as thou has dealt wi' the deid. She got awa' in peace throo the forgivingness o' th' maister o' Redmairshall."

Allan had been standing outside the inn door, but he took off his hat.

"Nay, Mistress Dinwoodie," said he solemnly. "Through that greater forgiveness whereof we all stand in need."

And Jeannie, though rebuked, felt pleased.

Allan had taken her hand, he had been "kin'ness itsel'," and lastly, he had "gi'en her her neame"—not often bestowed thus gravely and decorously upon the mistress of the lonely inn.

He had also thanked her for her great goodness to poor Meg and this was an additional glory to Jeannie. That the "Maister" should thus condescend was an honour; that she had deserved the thanks was but a secondary matter.

She and her forbears had been loyal to Redmarshall for many

a long day, and through many a dreary hour before now; they had never looked for thanks.

But *now* Jeannie felt a bigger woman and one of more importance.

"She'll be naythor ter haud nor ter bind," said the old frequenters of the inn when they gathered into the ingle-nook again, "she's that set oop."

But Mistress Dinwoodie shut herself up for a day or two and refused to exchange greetings—even with her oldest cronies—until all that was mortal of Meg Gordon had been laid to rest by Allan's orders, and with him and Jeannie as chief mourners, in the burial place that belonged of right to the Gordons of Redmarshall.

In death, if not in life, did Meg receive acknowledgment.

## CHAPTER XII.

It was the day after the funeral, and Redmarshall had not yet recovered from the horror and excitement of the last few days, a deep gloom brooded over the scene.

It was whispered abroad that Miss Priscilla was on the eve of departing from the house, which she believed to be on the verge of ruin; and public opinion speculated freely as to what would happen in such a case.

No one knew what things would come to at Redmarshall without Miss Priscilla. Not that she was beloved—far from it. But next best to being beloved is to be well hated; both insure popularity of antagonistic kinds, and although Miss Priscilla might not be absolutely *hated*, she was unquestionably *disliked*.

"A fine exhibition you got up for the village-folk yesterday," said Miss Priscilla, by way of greeting when Allan appeared at the table in the morning. "The idea of acknowledging a creature like that as a member of *this* family; we that have ever held up our heads with the best."

Allan sighed wearily. He dreaded *titte-à-tit* scenes with Priscilla, and Doris was long in making her appearance that morning.

"She was Rufus' wife," he replied quietly.

"She *said* so," very scornfully from Miss Priscilla.

"I verified her statement. I have a certificate of her marriage here. *That* should satisfy you, Priscilla."

"Oh, but it does not. I'm none so easily satisfied. Any fool can take *you* in, but I'm not to be got over."

Allan helped himself quickly to cream and sugar with his porridge.

A man of simple tastes, he always began this meal with a north-country dish.

"What will the county say?"

"It can say what it likes. Perhaps it knew Rufus better than we did."

Even the worm turns when trodden upon often and hard enough, and Allan's retort was sharp.

Miss Priscilla winced.

"Rufus was a man of genius; he was bent on raising the family name once more."

"On dragging it *down*, you mean, Priscilla."

"No, I don't. I don't believe in all the heroics about this young woman. You are just a cumberer of the ground; *he* was the hope of the family. Now we have no longer any such hope."

Allan bit his lip and curbed his rising wrath.

Long ago, in the remote period of his youth, he had promised to "stand by" Priscilla, and he had done so, accepting all that the process involved. It had been both bitter and hard. With Allan Gordon a promise *was* a promise, made to be kept. And this one had been made to his dead mother.

"And the wretched creature had deprived us of Rufus. That shows what she was—an ill-conditioned, ill-doing body. I'd never any opinion of Meg. All the time she was coming and going between this house and the farm she was corrupting Rufus."

"My dear Priscilla, Rufus corrupted her. Rufus was all that you say Meg was; he was not what you think."

"You always disliked him."

"God forgive you, Priscilla. You are strangely unjust."

At that moment Doris entered the room, looking fresh and sweet, in a white gown of light serge with some roses in her belt. She seemed to bring the freshness of the morning with her, and looked in striking contrast to Miss Priscilla in her robes of heavy and sombre black.

The elder lady's eyes fell with disapproval on the raiment of the younger one.

"This is the house of mourning," she remarked coldly.

"I know, and I am very sorry, Miss Gordon," said the girl.

"You show it," still more pointedly, with a significant glance at her dress.

"You look very nice," said Allan, speaking for the first time.

"Come and sit down here."

"Poor Rufus!" murmured Priscilla with eyes upturned to the roof. She was nursing her grief to the discomfort of the household.

"What a lovely morning! Shall we go for a walk?" asked Doris, turning her shoulder on Priscilla and speaking directly to Allan.

He nodded pleasantly.

"If you will just let me get through my letters."

"Oh!" in a tone of disappointment. "They are sure to be late."

The door opened and John came in with the bag. Whereat, Doris glanced at Allan and laughed, making a frown come to his sister's forehead.

Allan opened the bag and distributed the contents. One letter of a business nature for Priscilla, two for Doris, a dozen papers and letters for himself. He picked out one, laid it aside, and began with the rest.

Doris was watching.

"Do you keep the best till the last?"

"No; what I fear may be the *worst*," he replied with some emphasis. "And bad news can wait."

"How do you know it *is* bad news?" persisted Doris playfully. "Open it, *do*! I am devoured with curiosity."

"Allan never gets any good fortune," interposed Miss Priscilla. "He knows his own affairs, Miss Fitz-Gerald. He has always been a failure."

Doris coloured; but the taunt drove Allan to open his letter quickly.

Doris' head was bent, her heart was sore for his sake; but Miss Priscilla's frowns had deepened.

Neither of them saw the quick flush mount to Allan's forehead, nor saw how agitated he had become. His low exclamation, "At last!" made Doris lift her face.

"Well?" queried Priscilla sharply; "more trouble in store?"

He tried to shrug his shoulders, coughed, and tossed the letter, with an affectation of lightness, across to Doris.

Aloud he said calmly: "It is only about my book."

"Ah, that is an old song," returned his sister. "Refused again, no doubt."

"There is a change in the programme now," said Allan. "It is accepted, and I shall clear the estates, Priscilla."

"You!"

She pushed back her chair and stared.

"Yes; I."

"Oh, how glad—how glad I am! Did not I say it was grand? Now you will become a very famous man!" cried the girl enthusiastically.

Doris was so gay, so happy, that she arrested Priscilla's speech and made Allan's pulses quicken. All in a moment he realized what this letter had brought within his reach—fame, honour, wealth!

There never was a less ambitious man; but before him, too, there rose the vision of Redmarshall free; the family name cleared—through his efforts. *Here* was happiness indeed.

"Warmest congratulations!" cried Doris, alert with delight.

As for Allan, one moment of joy had transformed him, so that he looked younger and happier. But not one word of congratulation from Priscilla.

She sat like a rock, conscious of what this turn of the tide meant to her and to the family; yet without an acknowledgment of the man through whom it had come. Nay, she resented *his* part in it. He! He was a failure. Rufus should have done this, not Allan. She had always despised Allan. He had never been of much account before. Was it true that fortune was to smile upon the family through him? Miss Priscilla did not give herself time to dwell on this.

Hastily pushing back her chair, she rose.

"If you can afford to sit here all day, I cannot; so you must excuse me if I leave you now."

There was a strained look on Allan's face.

"'If a man ask bread of you, will you offer him a stone,'" he said quietly, as if to himself. "Moments like these are hard, Doris."

"They are horrible!" she cried in hot comradeship. "But



never mind. Let us go into the sunshine and forget all disagreeables."

"I must write a reply," he said, holding up the important letter.

"Of course. May I come into the study while you write it?"

The living companionship was what he needed. He said no word, but held out his hand and clasped hers. The warmth of it pleased him inexpressibly. The touch of it thrilled him to the very heart. He closed the door of the study, put her into a deep chair by the empty fireplace, and stood gazing down at her instead of writing his letter.

"Doris," he said, with an odd quiver in his voice, "it is sad to grow old."

The words were *à propos* of nothing that had gone before, but they appealed to her.

She lifted her eyes to his face.

"That is a sorrow common to the whole world, then."

"Yes. It never affected me as it does to-day."

"We can, at least, learn to grow old gracefully."

"Yes." A little smile crept over his features; then the sadder expression came back. She leaned back and watched him intently.

"Write your letter," she commanded quietly. "And while you write, I will try and devise plans for cheating Father Time."

"Oh, child, we can never do that."

"Oh, cannot we?"

A laugh—ringing, merry, joyous—woke the echoes of the dim old room. No one had laughed so for many a day—not even Doris herself. He went at her bidding; and she, closing her eyes, thought about the future; for she, too, had heard the rumours as to Miss Gordon's movements.

Outside, by the little green gate that led from the shrubbery into the paddock, old John and "Rob the Polis" were having one of their usual "cracks."

This was a "slack hour" with John to-day, and Rob had a bigger budget than usual, so a part of the morning had to be sacrificed, though great would be Miss Priscilla's wrath if she found them out. Old Rob had grown singularly defiant of Miss Priscilla of late. He had become quite gay ever since he had been told by Allan of the sad disclosures made by Meg. He felt even thankful that he had *not* had an opportunity of further distinguishing himself in the force, and had been making up his

mind that he was born to adorn a quiet domesticated existence, ever since Allan had promised him a lodge when one became vacant, and he was glad that the "maister" bore him no ill-will—blind and perverse though he had been. Indeed, he was always far more at ease with Allan than with Miss Priscilla. Rob and old John had a grand "crack" now over the Professor's affairs. The one reported that the master had no prospect of retrieving his fortunes and that he was sliding, as fast as Doris would let him, into his old ways "o' goin' on." "A sittin' fur iver i' yon greet big stoo dy," said John in the tone of a man who discusses a "grievance." "An' ye ken finely, Rob, that sittin' an' sittin', wi' a pen i' yer han', winna paay off th' estaate's misfortins, let alone fill oop yer empty chists. Mon," he added impressively, "he sud be oop an' doin'; though, wae's me, I canna pit ma min' upo' a sootable wark fur 'im."

"Nor me, naythor," added Rob, with an inward reflection as to the lodge in the day of Redmarshall's discomfiture.

"He's guid, is Maister Allan," he said presently, as a redeeming qualification.

"Aye, he's a' that," assented old John. "But, mon Rob, he's no high-headed enoo. He's ower quiet, is Maister Allan. I've no opeenion o' bukes mesel', not bein' a scholar, an' niver findin' th' wants o' em. Theer's a deal o' mischief i' literatoor, ter ma min', an' a tar'ble expainse i' buyin' wat's written. Ma seester's son, throo bein' handy wi's bukes, got inter a peck o' tribble; it cam' aisy ter him ter write, ye ken, an' he made ower free wi's maister's nyem and his cheque-buke, d'ye see? So he's repent-in' at laisure, an' a guid job ter, as I ses ter Mistress Thompson—a fine woomon, as can see na' furdur than th' aind o' her ain nose, fur she wudn't hev me wen I purposed till her a year last New'rear's. 'Git awa' wi yer impidince,' ses she. 'Me, bein' a widder-woman, I kens th' ways o' men-boddies, an' I dinna haud wi' em.' Did ye ivor hark at a woman loike that, Rob?"

"'Tis verra baad," said Rob sagely, shaking his head all the time. "She's a faymale o' leetle sinse, ter ma taaste, but what d'ye fin' at *her*, John?"

"Oh, she's a dacint han' at a deener, mon Rob; she can fettle oop th' vittles finely. I'se fair amazit betoimes, synne as wen I was ter ma mither's sister's darter's hoose i' Aberdeen a year goane last Martinmas; she wur joost sic an anither."

"John!"

Mrs. Thompson's voice, sharp and shrill, interrupted and changed the conversation at once.

"Some wimin-folk aire tar'ble boothersum," said Rob, who was an old widower and in his secret soul had doubts of the fair sex. "A' th' wittles i' th' warld wudna console me wi' a tongue like yon."

"Aye, aye—but—" there was still a soft spot in John's heart for the "wittles" if not for the woman—"but—she's a fine han', mon, an' a light ane for food, an' that's no a sma' matter, I can tell ye. Theer's waur boddies nor Mistress Thompson."

Then a more imperative summons hastened his departure and drove Rob away in a moralizing humour, thanking fortune that he had no "wimin-folk" to trouble *him*.

"John's sair fond o' his wittles, ter ma thinkin'," he mused. "Gie me a sup o' crowdie an' a bit scone or twa, an' I'll mak' a meal ony daay, I thank t' Hivin. I'se no sae muckle greedy. Eh, I doot I'll no be gettin' yon lodge arter a'."

He walked away in a very serious frame of mind, while John went back to the house.

"Ye're aye oot o' th' road when ye're wanted," said the housekeeper tartly. "It's a daffin' boddy 'at ye aire gettin', John; I've na patience wi' ye, clashin' on wi' that auld heepocreet, Rob."

"Tut, woman; he's na heepocreet," responded John, taking up the cudgels for his great cronie; but her wrath was unappeasable.

"I ken weel what he is, an' ye forbye, an' I winna ken mair aboot th' pair o' ye. Miss hes bin heer, raisin' th' wind."

"Is she gangin' awa?"

"No th' daay! But she wull gang."

"The suner th' better," put in John in heartfelt tones.

"That's naythor heer nor theer," reproved Mrs. Thompson. "We've hed a windfa', I tell ye. 'Gin ye hedna' bin carryin' on wi' ould Rob——"

"What'n a windfa'?" interrupted John, who had had enough of Rob and their joint ill-deeds. "Wha's gettin' it?"

"Th' maister. His buke's sold, I tell ye, an' oor fortin's made. Theer'll be nane noo ter lift a finger till us."

The good woman, who had clung to the house of Gordon

through fair and foul weather, flung herself into a chair, threw her apron over her eyes and burst into a good cry. Her heart was full.

John passed the back of his hand over his face in sympathy. Then he started off at a trot.

"I'se awa' ter tell——"

"Rob!" cried Mrs. Thompson, withdrawing the apron for an instant.

"Na, na," John, arrested, raised his hand in protest. "I'se gangin' ter gie 'm a sheake o' th' han'. Hoot, woman; I ha' hed him i' these airms as a babe. I'se loike ane o' his ain be noo."

Nor did he stop till he stood by Allan's side, and had made every bone in the younger man's hand ache with his grasp.

"Ah, friend!" said the master, "I knew you would be pleased, so I sent Miss Doris out to tell you the news."

"An' me ha'in' a bit crack wi' Rob! Eh, sirs, what a day this is fur Redmairshall."

And he went back to his work rejoicing.

"If I am a failure, I held their hearts," said Allan to his ward.

"You are the success of the family," she said, clapping her hands. Then she added very slowly and softly: "But I meant to do something."

"For what, Doris?"

She blushed beautifully over face and neck before she replied:

"For Redmarshall—and——"

"And—*what*?"

He was standing near her now, his hand on the back of her chair, and he was pale and quiet, full of wonder at what was happening.

To his horror she burst into tears, covering her face with both hands tightly.

"Don't cry, Doris; you grieve me. Tell me, dear, what you wanted to do?"

His tone was gentle, as if he were speaking to a child, and she sprang up indignantly.

"I am not a child," she said quickly. "I am old enough to understand—many things—myself included; and—and—*you*!"

The hands had dropped now, the tears were gone, the voice trembled between pain and laughter, and the glance shot towards him was shy, yet full of archness.

"But—I don't *understand*!"

He stood bewildered, confused ; he knew so little of such moods.

" I know you mean something generous and brave."

" Not at all. I am desperately selfish. Mr. Gordon, I want to—to help *you*."

" You have done so, scores of times. Heaven ever reward you !"

He had both her hands in his, and his heart was beating tumultuously ; yet no word of *love* escaped his lips.

He loved her, he knew, but he suffered no hint of this to reach her.

He loved her passionately. She was the very sunshine of his life ; if she went out of it—— He did not dare to think of *this*.

" Would God I were younger !" The cry broke from him suddenly, and it shook the girl's very soul, so that she bent towards him tenderly.

" Oh, Allan, Allan !" she cried, not knowing that she so called him. " Why will you not tell me everything ?"

His hands dropped to his sides.

" Old, worn-out, struggling ; what have I to tell ? What have I to offer ?"

" Yourself !"

She was close to him, her warm breath fanned his bent cheek, her touch was on his arm, caressingly, lovingly. Her very nearness moved him in spite of himself.

Was it possible ?

Nay, nay, was it likely ? Was she carried away by her too great generosity of soul ? What was he, what had *he* done to dare to hope for anything in return ?

All this rushed through his brain as they stood there.

Doris broke the spell that held them.

" Very well," said she quietly. " If you *will* not say a word, I *must*. It is indelicate, but—Allan Gordon, will you—— ?"

She said no more, for Allan opened his arms, and she crept into them trustfully and happily, like a child at peace and full of blessed love.

" It is almost too good to be true," said Allan, about an hour afterwards ; " and I am afraid you are making a mistake, my darling."

" I am a great deal too wise to do that, thank you ; but I am not clever, you know, Allan."

Allan's answer was to draw her closer to him and kiss her tenderly. The man had depths of love unknown before that were revealed at her touch. How he loved her! How he would cherish her!

Doris was the first to think of the outside world as represented by Miss Gordon.

"Allan," she said gravely, "there is—Priscilla!"

And for the first time in his manhood's history, Allan Gordon laughed at the mention of his sister's name.

"Yes, there is Priscilla," he said, in imitation of her tones. "I am afraid she must accept the inevitable."

Then her head went back to his shoulder, and contentment reigned in the dusty old room.

After all, the day was one of intense joy at Redmarshall.

Priscilla did not thaw, of course, but no one expected that she would. The servants were simply enchanted. They congratulated, rejoiced, and quarrelled with one another in the fulness of their hearts. It was very harmless quarrelling, an effort of Nature to relieve itself, and it did no one any injury.

"*We aire ter be married*," John announced to old Rob.

"*We're to hae a weddin'*," said Mrs. Thompson to her "*freens*," and the response was the same in both cases.

"*Hae ye made it oop atween ye? Eh, I allus sed as Joahn and Marg'et Tamson 'ud mak' a braw pair!*"

"*John an'—yer gran'mither!*" retorted the indignant Mrs. Thompson.

"*Whisht—whisht!*" cried the more cautious John. "*It's no oorsels, it's th' Heid o' th' Hoose, mon; an' sae we're ter marry th' yoong led dy, ye ken. Eh, theer's bonnie daays i' store fur auld Redmairshall yet!*"

And the voice of the county echoed his sentiments, for Allan was a man above his fellows, and had never an enemy in the world save they of his own kith and kin—the worst foes in the world, perhaps.

Yet, hand in hand, blessing and blest, they went on through life; and a newer life came to Redmarshall—happier days, a sense of peace, and that atmosphere of love that presages the bliss of a purer world to come.

THE END.



# LONDON SOCIETY.

## CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

1896.

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### The Rajah's Bedroom.

By FLORENCE MARRYAT.

#### PART I.

##### THE ROBBERY.

I SUPPOSE nobody has forgotten the great Manchester swindle, when Jonas Mears and Theodore Allcock managed to abscond with twenty thousand pounds of their employers, and bolted clean across the Atlantic before we could get on their trail. It took me six weeks of my time, and a regular chase and no mistake, before I ran the two scoundrels to earth in Chicago, where they were giving themselves out as English lords. However, I succeeded in catching their lordships, and I didn't care how much trouble it had cost me. We detectives enjoy sport as much as the best huntsman that ever rode across country. The chase is just as exciting—the game is much more wary—and if we can only be in at the death, with a brush to show for it, we don't mind how tired and done-up we may be! I had brought Messrs. Mears and Allcock safe back to their native country, and delivered them over to the proper authorities, and I thought I had earned a few days' rest. We had had a wretched passage across, with head winds against us eight days out of the ten, and my duty done, I thought with keen satisfaction of my little place at Fulham, and my own comfortable feather bed, and my wife waiting to welcome me home with a tasty little supper. The reality was as good as the anticipation. It was a beastly autumn afternoon, with a driving rain and a cold south-west wind, which would hardly let one keep one's hat on one's head; but the cottage looked bright and cosy and warm, and Nancy was as red as a peony from pleasure at seeing me. And let the ladies of to-day say what they like about it, there's a satisfaction to a man to see

CHRIS.

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his wife is glad to have him back again that nothing in the world can compete with. My Nancy is a regular good woman—a trifle stout in the person, perhaps, and lame of one leg from sciatica—but true as steel to her husband, and that's the main thing after all. We see, perhaps, more of "beauties," so called, in the police courts than anywhere else, but they're mostly bad, and I never saw the one yet as I'd exchange my Nancy for, though she's a jealous cat and won't believe it. But to return to my story. It was early when I reached home, not more than five o'clock, but I was regular beat, and when I had had my dinner off tripe and onions—Nancy knows there's nothing I like better than tripe and onions, after a hard day's work, it lies so light upon the stomach—I felt good for nothing but to go to bed and sleep. I was neither fit to talk nor think. I couldn't keep my eyes open, and my wife's chatter sounded like a confused medley of sound. I couldn't even relish a pipe, but took a drop of Scotch hot, and staggered up to my own room.

"Whatever you do, my dear," I said to Nancy, "don't disturb me till you hear I'm awake again, for I've got several nights' rest to make up. I may say I've not had a real night's sleep since I left you, what with anxiety to trace those two swindlers, and the fear lest they should do themselves an injury or escape me again, and I feel as weak as a rat. I'll lock my door, and don't come up till I unlock it—unless, indeed, 'tis something very particular, like a message from the chief or such-like."

"Lor', Jark!" exclaimed Nancy—whenever my wife uses the affectionate diminutive of my name, she always pronounces it as if she were a jackdaw making known its desire for food—it is peculiar and it is not pretty, but it is associated in my mind with herself—"Lor', Jark! he'd never be sending after you so soon as this, and you just off board ship. 'Twould be most unreasonable. You go to sleep and think no more of such foolishness."

"Nancy," I replied, "the business of the State must be attended to at any cost. I don't expect anything of the sort, but if a wire should arrive I must have it without delay."

"Drat the State!" cried Nancy, "it don't pay you over and above so much that it has any call to rob you of your natural rest. Go to sleep, John Busby, do, or you'll be fit for nothing to-morrow morning."

I find it difficult to convince my wife of the enormous import-

ance of my office and the dignity of my employers. She is always "dratting" the government and "blowing" the superintendent of police in a manner which would cost me my appointment if overheard, but she is a good wife to me and she means well. I suppose it is hard on a woman to have her husband called away at all manner of times, and never to know when to expect him back again. But I had no inclination to argue the matter then. I crawled upstairs to my bedroom and was soon between the blankets, sunk in a profound slumber—so profound that I became utterly unconscious to all external things and had not even the power to dream. It seemed as if I had been sleeping for hours, or days, when I was roused by the sound of an uncertain tapping on my bedroom door and an apologetic voice, calling in a loud whisper, "Jark!" As soon as I became sufficiently conscious to recognize the voice, I was sure something of importance must have occurred, and was on the alert in a moment, for we detectives learn to sleep with our ears open.

"What is it, Nancy?" I exclaimed, hurrying to open the door. My wife was half crying outside it, with a yellow envelope in her hand.

"Oh, Jark!" she said, "there's a nasty telegram come for you and I wouldn't have let you see it for ever so, only I was afraid you might be angry with me; but however they can have the heart to do it——"

"Here! give me the message at once," I said, and she handed it to me. I tore the envelope open—out fluttered the pink paper, on which was written: "Important robbery at the Gables, Manningford. Travel down by mail train."

"What time is it, Nancy?" I asked, as I hurried on my clothes again.

"Just gone ten. But oh, Jark! you're never going to start off again when I haven't no more than seen your face," said the poor woman crying.

"Well, it looks like it, Nan, but it isn't my fault, as you well know. I'd be glad enough to spend a few quiet days with you, but business is business my dear, and the State claims my first attention."

"Oh, hang the State!" exclaimed Nancy angrily. "Why can't it keep more detective officers, I should like to know, instead of working them, as it does, to skin and bone? Here you are,

just come off the boiling ocean, and I might have lost you twenty times over, for when we had a hurricane last week Mrs. Judkins, she said to me, 'It's a miracle, in my opinion, Mrs. Busby, if you ever see your poor husband again, and——'

"Yes, yes, but never mind Mrs. Judkins just now. I am here, safe and sound, you see, after all. But get me out my other suit, Nancy, for the last day I was aboard the 'Atalanta' she shipped a sea over this one, and it must go to the cleaner's. The Gables is a big place, I've heard, and I must dress according."

"And how long will you be gone, Jark?"

"That I can't say. It must be a serious robbery or the chief wouldn't have ordered me to travel by the night mail. No time to be lost, I guess. Now, get me a hansom, there's a good lass; I must call at the Yard for my instructions before I catch the mail from Paddington."

My wife did as I requested her, weeping quietly the while. I kissed her hastily, jumped into the hansom, told the driver to go as if the old man were after him, and started for Scotland Yard. I can't say I liked it. It is all very well to be zealous in your duty, and I hope no one can say as I ever neglected mine, but it is a bit hard that a man can't have his night's rest out when he has just come off a sea voyage, and an absence of six weeks from home. However, I had one consolation. My vanity was flattered by the call, for if they had had another man that would have done as well they wouldn't have taken the trouble to telegraph after me. Indeed, the inspector told me as much as soon as ever I entered the yard.

"I was sorry to have you up again so soon, Busby," he said, 'but there's no help for it. Just had information from Manningford to send down the sharpest detective we have, and you know who that is when you're at home.'

This compliment from our inspector, who is no flatterer, as a rule, pleased me very much, and I felt the strength of a lion rise in me at his words; I fancy I got a bit red as I answered:

"Thank you kindly, sir. I suppose the business is of importance?"

"Every importance. Property to the amount of thirty thousand pounds missing, under circumstances which seem to point to—however, I shall leave you to find out that for yourself. You may be detained some days in the Gables, indeed you are sure to be. Are you prepared for it?"

"I can write to Mrs. Busby for what I may require, sir," I replied. "May I ask on whose information we are acting?"

"Oh, yes, no secrecy about the matter. The person who has written for your attendance is Sir Charles Ellesmere, the master of the house. His father died only last week, was buried yesterday, the jewels found missing after the reading of the will. He says they are of fabulous value and a family heirloom."

"All the better," I said; "they will be the more easily traced. They won't give me so much trouble as Messrs. Mears and Allcock's gold and silver did. Stones can't be melted down into lumps of ore."

"Ah, Busby," the inspector was good enough to say for the second time, "*that* was a sharp piece of work and it won't be forgotten. You'll reach Manningford about five o'clock, so you had better put up at an hotel till you've had your breakfast; then off to the Gables as soon as may be."

"Very good, sir; I'll start at once, and wire you all particulars as soon as I've heard them. And if I require assistance, I'll have Crewe, if you are willing. He has the coolest head I know."

"After your own, Busby," said the inspector, laughing, and I thanked him again and started on my journey. It was November, and the nights were bitterly cold. I wrapped myself up well in my rug, and leaning back in a corner of the railway carriage, tried to resume my broken slumbers, but it was useless. I had been too thoroughly roused. When I arrived at the Manningford Hotel I sat in a warm corner of the coffee-room till it was light enough to have my breakfast. By that time several of the customers, chiefly travellers, were down also, and two or three outsiders had strayed in to warm themselves with a cup of tea or coffee before they started on their day's work. I soon found that the mysterious robbery at the Gables was the general topic of conversation.

"But it's quite incomprehensible," said one man; "the jewels were safe and sound in the old baronet's bedroom a week before he died, for Rachel Marks saw them with her own eyes, and no one entered the room till after, and then only the undertakers."

"Ah! them undertakers," exclaimed another man; "I wouldn't trust them any further than I could see 'em. Why, I remember when my mother died and they was left in the room to lay her

in her coffin there wasn't a pin left in the cushion the next morning, and the very soap was took out of the soap-dish, for I've heard my sister say so a score o' times."

"Them jewels was worth a power of money," interposed a third; "the old gentleman he got them from the King of the Ingies, and they were valued at a million pounds."

"He stole them, most likely," said the first speaker; "it was in the days of old John Company, when the Britishers they stole right and left, 'loot' they called it, but it came to the same thing. And now you see this is what they calls a Nemesis; they've lost them again. Lor! it won't be for long. Sir Charles he have telegraphed for a detective from London, and all the servants are forbid to leave the house till he comes. He'll find 'em, never fear. They can't have walked off by themselves, nor they can't be far, neither. All I know is, that I wouldn't like to be t'ie man as has got 'em. The officer, he'll sniff 'em out soon enough."

"The *man*," repeated his companion contemptuously; "'tain't no *man* as has those jewels. He'd better shake out my lady's skirts instead. That's where the jewels is gone. She was always mad to get 'em, and mad against the young baronet, and she has 'em, you may take my word for it."

"Ah! there's no artfulness to beat the artfulness of a woman," sighed, rather than said, the other man, as though he had cause to know it.

I listened to their talk, but, of course, I said nothing. So that was the way the land lay, I thought to myself. It was true that little dependence was to be placed on these bucolic opinions, yet a long experience had taught me that there was seldom smoke without fire. I tried to maintain an unprejudiced mind, but it is difficult to extinguish a train of thought once lighted, and I found myself thinking there might be a good deal of sense in the labourer's surmise.

As soon as my breakfast was concluded and I could leave the hostel without creating suspicion as to my errand, I made my way quietly to the Gables, and sending in my card, inquired for Sir Charles Ellesmere. The old butler, who answered the door to me, glanced at the card and then at me, and said quietly:

"I'm glad you've come, sir. There's been a terrible upset here."

"So I understand. What is your name?"

"Goddard, sir, and I've been man and boy in the Gables ever



since the late master came home from the East Indies, now forty years ago."

"Ah! Then I daresay you'll be a valuable adjunct in this matter; I shall have a talk with you, Goddard, by-and-bye. At present my first business lies with your master."

"Of course, sir. This way, if you please," and the butler preceded me into a handsome library, well furnished with bookshelves.

## PART II.

### THE SUSPICION.

IN another minute the door reopened, and Sir Charles Ellesmere, dressed in deep mourning, stood before me. He was a singularly handsome young man, though looking pale and careworn. He motioned me to a seat and took one himself.

"You wired to Scotland Yard for me yesterday, I understand, Sir Charles?" I commenced.

"I did. There has been a most serious robbery committed on these premises, and I suppose, Mr. Busby," he said, looking at my card, which he held in his hand, "that I must tell you everything I know concerning it."

"It would be better, Sir Charles," I replied; "perhaps you will begin by describing the jewels you have lost."

"I know very little about jewellery," he said, "but they were magnificent, and my late father has often told me that they were valued at from twenty-five to thirty thousand pounds."

"They must have been unique to have cost that sum," I remarked.

"He did not buy them; they were a gift to him for services received. Before he came into the title, he was an officer in the East India Company's service, and rendered an important benefit to the Rajah of Tanibore, whose kingdom was in a state of mutiny, in order to quell which, the Company had volunteered the assistance of one of their regiments, in which my father held the rank of lieutenant. A night attack was made upon the palace and the troops were ordered out, my father, of course, being amongst them. The Rajah had taken refuge in his harem, the portals of which my father's company had been told off to guard, when a mob of fanatics burst in by a side door, and took them completely by surprise. In the *mêlée* which ensued, the

Rajah would certainly have been killed, had not my father, with great dexterity, kept his assailants at bay till some of his soldiers came to his assistance. In return for this service the Rajah, who was deeply grateful, presented him with the ornament from his turban, which comprised some of the State jewels, and begged that it should be handed down in his family as an heirloom. Shortly afterwards my father came into his title and property. He returned to England and settled down here. He married, and I am the sole issue of his marriage."

"You considered, then, Sir Charles, that the Rajah's heirloom would naturally descend to you and your children after you."

"I have been told so times out of mind. When I was a mere infant, and my father was proud of me, he used to produce these jewels for me to play with, and tell me they were my own. When I was a lad, he would show them occasionally to his friends, and always ended up by saying, 'They will be Charles's when I am gone. It was the express wish of the Rajah of Tanibore that it should be so.' And as a young man he has again and again said laughingly to me, 'It behoves you to marry, my boy, whether you wish it or not, else who will there be to inherit the jewels of the Rajah of Tanibore?' I never dreamt for a moment that it would be otherwise, until—until——"

"Until what? If I am to assist you in this matter, Sir Charles, you must please to be quite candid with me. You must not from false delicacy keep back anything."

"Well, then, I will say that until my father married again, I never thought it possible that he would disregard the Rajah's wish concerning them."

"The late baronet married a second time, then. The present Lady Ellesmere is not your mother?"

"Oh dear, no. My mother died when I was about sixteen."

"And your present age, Sir Charles?"

"Twenty-five on my last birthday."

"This lady whom your late father married, was she young?"

"Very young in comparison with him—about thirty, I should think."

"And—pardon the question—may I ask if you are and always have been on good terms with this lady, Sir Charles?"

The young man looked distressed. Before he answered me he glanced up into my face and inquired:

"Is this quite necessary?"

"Quite necessary, Sir Charles. I cannot pass a reasonable judgment on the facts presented to me unless I perfectly understand the terms on which the parties concerned are with one another."

"Then, if I must speak, Mr. Busby, my step-mother has always been my bitterest enemy with my late father. From the day she entered this house as Lady Ellesmere her aim has been to keep me out of it. When my own mother died and my father married again, I felt bound to adopt some profession, and took up that of medicine. It is a wild profession, at least, amongst its younger votaries, as doubtless you know, and I was as wild as my companions, I daresay, but not worse. But I used to think that there must be some spy set upon my actions, every little frolic was repeated to my father with such exaggerations that he became at constant variance with me, and it was a penalty to go home instead of a pleasure. I felt lonely and as if I had no home, and this feeling, perhaps, as much as any other, induced me to marry, rather imprudently as it seemed at the time, a young lady to whom I had become much attached."

"You are a married man, then, Sir Charles?" I said.

"Yes. I have been married six months now."

"And your lady is in the house?"

"She is. I sent for her as soon as my father's will was made known to me."

"Will you kindly proceed, and let me know under what circumstances the Rajah's heirloom was missed?"

"It was like this, Mr. Busby. A week before my father died he sent for me and accused me of having married Miss Lascelles—that was the name of my wife—without his consent or knowledge. I retaliated by saying that he had shown no interest in my proceedings lately, and therefore I did not consider that I owed him any confidence. I also demanded who it was who had informed him of the fact. He refused to tell me, but fell into a terrible passion, declaring that he had cut me out of his will and left me dependent on the bounty of my step-mother. I was deeply mortified, but too proud to remonstrate with him. We parted in anger, and a week after they wrote to tell me he was dead, and that I was expected to attend the funeral. I came down here in consequence, quite believing that my father's threats

to me had been carried out. Judge of my surprise, then, when the will was read after the funeral, to find that they had been made merely to frighten me—that I inherited all the property with the exception of a settlement made upon his wife at the time of their marriage, including the famous jewel, which was expressly mentioned as a family heirloom. But when the solicitor came to look for the jewels in the strong box in which they had always been kept in my father's bedroom, they had vanished—there was not a trace of them left. Upon which, by his advice, I wired at once to Scotland Yard for assistance, and forbid any of the servants leaving the Gables till you had arrived."

"You did wisely, Sir Charles, but may I ask if any one has left the house, even for a walk, since the will was read?"

"No one, that I am aware of. The ladies have kept closely to their own rooms. The funeral took place only the day before yesterday."

"And how many inmates does the house contain at the present moment?"

"There is my step-mother, the Dowager Lady Ellesmere; my wife, Miss Craley, a poor *protégée* of my late father, but she doesn't count, and the servants. Goddard the butler has known me from a baby, and so has the upper housemaid, Nelson. The others have been changed several times since my father re-married; I know little or nothing of them."

"Will you describe these jewels to me, as accurately as you can, Sir Charles?"

"Certainly. The centre one was an enormous emerald; that was surrounded by a circle of large brilliants; those, again, by emeralds and rubies, then brilliants. I can hardly describe the effect of them to you. They blaze like fire, and I have told you their estimated value."

"Too valuable and remarkable for any common person to meddle with," I observed. "If they have been stolen, it has been done by practised professional thieves, or—or——"

"Or—whom?" demanded Sir Charles. "You don't imagine I would steal my own jewels, do you?"

"Not exactly, Sir Charles, but I suppose you know it will be necessary for me to examine everybody who may be in the house, separately, and to make a thorough search and investigation of all the property contained in it?"

"I suppose so. With whom will you begin?"

"Well, the next person of importance after yourself would seem to be the Dowager Lady Ellesmere. Would it be convenient for me to interview her before I proceed to the others?"

"Certainly! I believe she is expecting you with some anxiety. Will you accompany me to her boudoir?"

I rose and followed him from the room. He did not appear to entertain any suspicion of his step-mother, with regard to the robbery, but to my practised eye it seemed as clear as daylight. However, one of our first rules is, never to be prejudiced by the story of one witness, but to keep our heads clear till we have heard all there is to tell.

The young baronet preceded me to the boudoir, and simply saying, "This is Mr. Busby from Scotland Yard, Lady Ellesmere," left me alone with his step-mother. Heavens! what a beautiful woman she was. As she rose to receive me, I thought I had never seen anything so handsome out of a picture. Her appearance made quite a revulsion in my feelings regarding her. I thought it must be quite impossible that such an open-browed, candid-looking woman could commit a mean robbery on her husband's son. She may have been about thirty, as Sir Charles had said. She was tall and finely made, like a Juno, with a stately carriage and a superb head and shoulders. Her skin was as white as milk, her eyes large and blue as a child's, her fair hair was twisted round her head like a coronet—she ought to have been a duchess at the very least. Her voice, too, when she spoke, was as soft and musical as a flute. Heaven forgive me: if Nancy could have read my thoughts as I gazed on this lovely woman, she would never have cooked tripe and onions for my supper again.

"You are the detective for whom Sir Charles has telegraphed," she commenced by saying.

"Yes, my lady, I am," I replied, and then she waved her hand towards a chair in the most graceful manner and said:

"Pray sit down," upon which I did as she desired me, and she resumed her own seat.

"This is a most unfortunate affair, Mr. Busby," she commenced, and I replied:

"Without doubt, my lady, it is."

"To happen at such a moment, too, when we are all so distressed about the poor dear baronet's death, makes it doubly annoying."

"But, as your ladyship must perceive, such an impudent robbery could only take place at a time of distress and confusion. The thieves have counted on that, to allow them time to make off with their booty."

"But I trust you will stop them," she said with a faint smile.

"I hope so, but in order to do it, I must ask you to afford me all the help in your power, Lady Ellesmere, by telling me everything you can about the theft, and the circumstances in which it must have been carried out."

"Of course, I quite understand that, but there seems very little to tell. When the solicitor, Mr. Cator, unlocked the safe after my late husband's will was read, in order to deliver over the jewels into the keeping of Sir Charles, they were gone—not a vestige of them anywhere. That is all that anybody knows about it."

"But I want to know what took place before your husband's death, in order that I may judge if the robbery were planned, or unpremeditated. Will you kindly tell me on what terms the present baronet was with his father?"

She looked startled and said much as Sir Charles himself had done.

"Is that necessary? Am I to disclose family secrets to a stranger?"

"If the stranger is to help to unravel the mystery, my lady, yes. Sir Charles has told me as much as he thought would help me in the matter."

At that, her eyes gleamed with a less subdued light, and I guessed she had another side to her character than the one she had hitherto displayed to me.

"Oh! if that is the case, I need have no hesitation," she replied.

"Well, then, he behaved shamefully to his poor father, Mr. Busby, and I—I conclude I speak in confidence to you."

"Most certainly, my lady. You can say what you choose, as safely as if I were a doctor or a priest."

She rose and going to the door, locked it, then returning to my side, she stooped and whispered:

"My own private belief is that Sir Charles was the cause of his father's death."

I stared at her, wondering if she were a little insane, or excited by drink. You see, I've come across a lot of that sort of thing amongst ladies of late years, and nothing astonishes me now.



But on second thoughts I dismissed both ideas. Lady Ellesmere meant what she said, whether she believed it or not.

"I will tell you the facts, Mr. Busby, and you can make of them what you like. The present baronet and his father have always been on bad terms with each other. He was furious with Sir Henry for marrying me; furious with us both for loving each other; his dissipations nearly broke his father's heart and his extravagances sorely tried his purse. Still, Sir Henry never spoke of cutting him out of his will until news reached him through a mutual acquaintance that his son had been married for the last six months without giving us the slightest intimation of the fact. Sir Henry was then as well as you or I—a hale, hearty man of sixty, without an ailment of any sort. He wrote for his son to come down and see him, which he did, not knowing that his father had heard his secret, and a terrible scene ensued. Sir Henry raved, as I consider he had a good right to do, and the young man cursed and swore, and it ended by his father disowning him and saying that he had cut him out of his will and left him dependent upon myself. Sir Charles, as he is now, rushed from the house vowing vengeance. I and several of the servants heard him, and when we went in to Sir Henry we found him laid back in his chair speechless and almost unconscious from the fearful excitement he had passed through. We got him up to his bed, which he never left again, dying within the week."

And here the newly-made widow put her cambric handkerchief to her eyes and dabbed them delicately.

"You wish me to understand——" I said demurringly.

"I wish neither you nor any one to adopt my opinions," she answered sharply. "You asked me to tell you everything and I have done so. My poor husband tried until he drew his last breath to make us all understand that his son had killed him. Though paralyzed and unable to speak he pointed incessantly to the strong box in his room where the jewels were kept, but I—having heard him say so often that he would rather leave them to me, to whom he was most tenderly attached, than to his son, who would only squander them in dissipation—believed that he merely wished to intimate that they were to be my own. I thought he spoke the truth when he told me that he had altered his will, and was quite taken by surprise when I found that

nothing was to be mine except my marriage settlement. But the jewels were gone by that time."

"Your idea is——" I said, desirous of leading her on ; but I perceived that she was an acute woman and quite capable of keeping her own secrets.

"I have no ideas, Mr. Busby, as I have already told you," she replied quickly. "All I know for certain is that on the Tuesday I saw and handled the Rajah's heirloom—the housemaid, Rachel Marks, was with me at the time and can confirm my statement—that on the Wednesday the present baronet had this stormy interview with his father, from the effects of which my husband never recovered ; that a week after he was dead and the jewels were already gone. *When* they went and *who* took them is for you to find out."

"But, if I understand your insinuation aright, the thief only took his own property?"

"But he didn't know that it *was* his property," she answered ; "he had just been told that it had been left away from him."

"But now, surely, there could be no further necessity for concealment?"

"No one would care, I conclude, to confess himself to be a thief even if no punishment could follow. It was necessary to make a fuss about the loss, but whether it was assumed or not you may be a better judge than myself."

"No one, you say, saw the jewels after you had handled them on the Tuesday?"

"No one in this house saw them after that," she answered determinately. "I locked them away in the strong box in Sir Henry's bedroom with my own hands, and the key lay, as it always did, in a drawer of his bureau. It was found there after his death."

"But, pardon me, I suppose there were attendants passing in and out of the sick room?"

"Certainly, but I am sure no servant in this house would dare to touch such a valuable thing, and before the baronet's own eyes. Besides, Julia Craley never left Sir Henry's side day or night."

"And may I ask who Julia Craley is?" I demanded.

## PART III.

WHAT GODDARD SAW.

"JULIA CRALEY," replied Lady Ellesmere, "is a *protégée* of the late baronet's, the daughter of a distant cousin of his, who was left a penniless orphan and thrown on his bounty for protection and support. She was deeply attached to Sir Henry; her love for him and for his son also was more like that of a dog than a human being. To attack them or their property was like attacking her life. She would never have allowed a creature but myself to have touched anything that belonged to them."

"A rare fidelity, Lady Ellesmere," I replied. "Might I ask to see this lady?"

"It would be of no use," said my informant, "she can neither hear you nor speak to you. She is a deaf mute and almost imbecile. A most unfortunate young woman, who has been left in the will to the good favour of Sir Charles. I presume she will reside with them at the Gables."

"Truly unfortunate," I murmured. "Still I should like to see her, even if we cannot converse together. It is part of my business to leave no stone unturned."

"I believe she is out at present," replied Lady Ellesmere, "indeed, I am sure she is, for I saw her go down the garden path a few minutes ago. But she will soon be back; she is not strong enough for long walks. Is there no one else you could speak to in the interval, Mr. Busby?"

"Certainly, there is Lady Ellesmere; Sir Charles's wife, I mean," I added, seeing the cloud that rose to the lady's brow at the mention of the name.

"But she only arrived here yesterday," she said, with her hand upon the bell.

"Nevertheless I must see her," I replied, and she rang the bell sharply and told the servant to conduct me to the presence of Sir Charles's wife. He ushered me into another morning-room, where a pretty, graceful young lady of about eighteen or nineteen received me with a certain amount of trepidation, which I hastened to allay.

"Pray do not be nervous, Lady Ellesmere," I said; "I only want to put two or three questions to you respecting these lost jewels. I understand that you only arrived here yesterday. I presume, therefore, that you have not seen them."

"Oh, no, never," she replied in a girlish, diffident way.

"Has Sir Charles ever spoken of them to you?"

"Yes, often. He used to tell me how beautiful they were, and of the manner in which they had come into the possession of his father from the Rajah of Tanibore, and that they were to be his when Sir Henry died."

"I suppose he had never the least doubt of that?"

"Oh, never. He has drawn them for me so that I might have some idea of their shape and size, and he has often told me, long before we were married, how he intended to have them set in order that his future wife might wear them."

"Had you heard anything of these unhappy quarrels with his father, Lady Ellesmere?"

"Sometimes my husband spoke of them, but not often. The thought of them made him too unhappy. He was very fond of his father, and so was his father of him until the—the—other Lady Ellesmere came between them."

"But it has been all hearsay with you."

"Yes, all hearsay."

At this juncture the door of the room opened, and Sir Charles's voice was heard, coaxing some one to enter.

"Come along, Julia," he said; "come along and see Gertrude. Come with Charlie."

An uncouth sound, unlike the speech of human creature or animal, was uttered in reply to this appeal, and I saw Lady Ellesmere shrink back a little as she said:

"Oh, it is poor Julia. He is bringing her in here."

The next moment the young baronet had entered, dragging by the hand a most distressing-looking object, in the shape of a deformed woman of about four feet high, with a large face and head—a repellent expression and very ugly features. She was clinging to his hand and gazing in his face with a look that was meant to be affectionate, but, to me, seemed very repulsive, but as soon as she caught sight of young Lady Ellesmere and myself she gave a sort of angry scream, like that of a monkey, and hobbled quickly away. Sir Charles entered the room laughing.

"Poor Julia cannot overcome her jealousy of you, Gertrude," he said. "I cannot get her over the threshold of the room. She regards you as an intruder to the family. Poor little creature. How terrible it must be to have no intellect"

"Is that Miss Craley, Sir Charles, of whom the Dowager Lady Ellesmere has been telling me?" I inquired.

"Yes. She is an unfortunate member of our family, whom my late father adopted when an infant, and she has run loose at the Gables ever since. She is almost, if not quite, imbecile. She can neither speak nor hear, and scarcely understands anything. I believe she understood what my father said better than any one else. She was devoted to him, and would sit at his feet for hours gazing in his face. I am sure she feels his death."

"Oh, Charlie, she is very fond of you," exclaimed his wife. "That is why she dislikes me."

"She is like an animal," he replied. "She had the same aversion for my stepmother, just because my father liked her. Imbeciles sometimes have very strong feelings, though they have no power of expressing them."

"This is the lady who remained by the late baronet's side all the time he was ill, then?" I said.

"Yes, so I understand, and is supposed to have kept a strict guard over the Rajah's heirloom," said Sir Charles. "I suppose the dowager told you that? But what dependence is there to be placed on the sharpness of an idiot, even if she could tell us what she saw or heard? I consider that proof utterly valueless. A dozen people may have entered the sick chamber whilst Julia was dozing and rifled every lock in the place."

"Who also watched beside the baronet's bed?" I asked.

"Goddard, the butler. He has been in the family for forty years, and always nursed my father in his illnesses."

"With your leave, then, Sir Charles, I should like to examine Goddard next."

"With pleasure. If you will descend to the library, Mr. Busby, I will send him to you."

Bowing to the lady I left the room with Sir Charles. We found the deformed woman crouched outside the door with her eyes eagerly directed towards it. As the young baronet passed her he placed his hand upon her head.

"Poor July," he ejaculated kindly. The dwarf seized his hand and kissed it passionately, at the same time giving him a look which, to my mind, fully accounted for her jealousy of and dislike to the pretty young wife inside the room.

"Were I Sir Charles," I thought, "I shouldn't care to have  
CHRIS,

that evil-minded little humpback too near my wife, lest she should do her an injury. Creatures of this sort are often as vicious as they are ugly." But of course I kept my thoughts to myself.

Goddard entered the library with a stealthy step and a look of grave importance. Evidently, he was bristling with news.

"I am glad you sent for me before any of the other servants, sir," he commenced, "for I fancy I can put you on a track that will make their revelations more significant to you."

"I am glad to hear it, Mr. Goddard," I replied, "as this case appears to be rather a difficult one, and we want all the light thrown upon it that is possible. When did you last see these jewels?"

"Not for ages and ages, sir; them sort of things have no interest for me, and barring that my late master got them in return for a very gallant action, I shouldn't never have looked at them at all. But when a robbery has been committed from a well-known house like the Gables, be it of jewels or anything else, it behoves every one to put on his considering cap and think *who* has been about the house and what they've seen as has struck them as suspicious in connection with the circumstances. Do you agree with me, sir?"

"Most certainly I do. You take a very sensible view of the matter, Mr. Goddard. Have you ever seen any suspicious-looking characters about the Gables of late?"

Goddard drew nearer to me and lowered his voice.

"This here is in confidence, sir. You wouldn't get me into a scrape with the young master?"

"Of course not. Are you not acting in his interest?"

"Why, certainly; but things seem a bit mixed to me. Well, sir, you see servants ain't all deaf and dumb like that pore creetur as is kept here out of charity—we has our senses, sir, and our feelins, and we can't always shut our eyes to what is a-goin' on. Well, it was about a month ago when I fust see, one evening, as I was putting up the shutters in the libery, a dark figger lurking along the shrubberies—I couldn't see him very plainly, but he looked like a loafer or a tramp to me—I didn't like the looks of him at all, and I called James, the footman, to go out into the gardin and see who it might be, but James being but a lad and timorous-like, was such a time about obeying my orders, that when he went the man was gone, though I'm as certain I saw him as I am that I see ycu at this present moment."



"Well, well, but what of it? you must often have beggars and tramps round a large house like this."

"This wasn't no beggar," resumed Goddard mysteriously. "Well, sir, the Tuesday before my old master was taken with his last illness, her ladyship had out the jewels in the forenoon, rubbing them up and showing them to Sir Henry and Miss Craley—that's the pore deformed lady, you know—Rachel Marks was passing in and out of the room at the time and can bear witness to the fact. My lady she held them against her gown and she says to Rachel, 'They'll be mine some day, Rachel,' and Miss Craley, she screamed in her queer way, and Sir Henry smiled as if it was all right, though mind you, I don't believe nothing would have made him leave them there jewels away from Sir Charles, not if he'd been in his right senses, not for ever so."

"You were present at the interview between Sir Henry and his son on the following day, I believe, Goddard?"

"Yes, sir, I was, and I hope never to be present at such another, for I really thought they would have flown at one another's throats. Sir Henry, he was in a terrible state, and the young 'un was as bad; and I heard the old master say that Sir Charles was no son of his, and that he'd cut his name out of his will, and he'd be left a pauper on the bounty of the Dowager Lady Ellesmere, though I for one never believed it, and knew it was only said in a passion like, and that in his heart the old master loved his son better than any one else. Well, sir, you've heard how it ended, and we had to carry poor Sir Henry up to his bed, where he lay till he died, unable to speak or swallow. That evening, as I was watching by his bed, with little Miss Craley crouched down by his side, moaning just like an animal in distress, my eyes kept turning to the window just to divert my thoughts, and presently I see the same figger I've spoke of loafing round the shrubberies, and keeping well in the shadder; and while I was looking there comes out a second figger and joins him, and I could have sworn that it was my lady—but for God's sake, sir, you won't betray me, for I couldn't be sure, but Mrs. Nelson, who have been here almost as long as I have, will tell you the same, that is, that my lady *did* go out that evening in the dusk, and she see her pass into the shrubberies and come back alone; and that's all I know about the missing of the jewels, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Goddard ; your confidence shall be respected. Will you send Mrs. Nelson to me?"

When the old man had gone I rose from my chair and began to pace the library. An accomplice—a probable lover—on the scene ; that put an entirely fresh complexion on the matter. I seemed to see it all as clear as day. An old man with a young and beautiful wife, who was jealous of his son, and tried to set him in every way against him in order that she might inherit the property. She believed herself to have gained her object, and then the old man's sudden illness prevents the accomplishment of her plan ; she determines at all risks to secure the jewels for herself ; calls in her accomplice, or, as I surmise, her lover ; gives them into his charge, perhaps to take out of the country until she can join him, and so they might be gone beyond recall. But I would get to the bottom of the mystery if mortal man could do it. It was a more intricate case than I had expected, so much the more kudos might I gain from unravelling it. My blood rose at the prospect ; I felt quite excited by the time the prim, old-fashioned housekeeper of the Gables had entered my presence. She was a quaint-looking old woman, the very picture of a servant of trust in her respectable black silk gown and her white quilled cap. She courtesied low as she encountered me, and stood like a statue with her mittened hands crossed over her apron, to hear what I might have to say to her.

"Your name is Mrs. Nelson, I believe," I commenced.

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose, as you have been for so long in the family, that you have often seen the missing jewels?"

"I have seen them several times, sir."

"And when did you see them last, Mrs. Nelson?"

"Not for a long time, sir, my business not lying in the upper storeys of the house."

"Can you tell me when you heard of them last?—what you can remember happening on the Tuesday and Wednesday preceding your late master's death?"

"I don't know much about the Tuesday, sir, excepting that Rachel Marks came down to my room all of a flutter to tell me that my lady had shown her the Rajah's jewels. She said she had never seen anything so beautiful in her life before ; that they flashed like lightning, and she would die if she could only have some like them."

"Ah, Rachel Marks said that, did she?"

"Yes, sir; foolish and girl-like, as I told her, for what use would such valuables be to her, specially if she was dead? but I feel sure she had seen them, for she was quite excited over it. My lady was rubbing them with a piece of chamois leather, she said, till they looked like a rainbow of colour; but that's all I know about the Tuesday."

"And the Wednesday, Mrs. Nelson?"

"Ah! that was a terrible day for us all, sir. Master Charles (as he was then) came down from London by the eleven o'clock train, and saw Sir Henry in the libery. There was high words between them—we servants could hear them plainly down in the kitchen and it frightened us to death—and my lady was listening outside in the hall, too, with a face like a sheet. We heard Sir Henry say: 'That's right! strike your father! it will be only another crime added to your record!' and Master Charles replied: 'If I was to kill you it would be scarcely a worse crime than that woman' (meaning her ladyship, if you please, sir) 'has induced you to commit against me!' We was all listening in the passage, sir, and our hair stood on end to hear them. Mr. Goddard, he was for breaking in the door to prevent bloodshed, but presently Master Charles came out, looking very white, and he says, 'Good-bye to you all. I shall never darken these doors again!' and he rushed away into the grounds and we saw no more of him till he came down for the funeral. There was no sound from the libery, and after awhile my lady went in and gave a scream, and then we all followed her, and there was my poor old master sitting in his chair with his mouth drawn to one side! Goddard and me, we saw it was a stroke at once, and when we'd carried him up to his bed we sent for the doctor. Mr. Goddard, he was told off to see after Sir Henry, and by the evening he seemed a goodish bit better, and the doctor didn't think there was any danger, so Mr. Goddard left him for a bit with little Miss Craley, who couldn't be persuaded to leave his side—she was that fond of him and Master Charles—and came down to tell me how he was a-getting on. And then it was he told me of the figger that he had seen loitering about the premises some days before, and how he'd seen it again that very moment entering the shrubberies."

"What did you say to that?"

"Why, sir, my first thought was for my lady, who had left the house but a short time before. Whatever would she do, I said, if she met the man and he was rude to her? I had seen her in the hall wrapping a dark mantle round her head and shoulders, and I had ventured to say, surely she was never going out at such a time—half-past six, sir, and such a dark evening—and she replied that she had a headache and must have some fresh air, so of course I said no more. Mr. Goddard and me, we watched at the dining-room windows for over half-an-hour, and then we saw my lady coming out of the shrubberies by herself; I went to meet her in the hall and her cloak was wringing wet. I said: 'It is to be hoped that you won't catch your death of cold, my lady,' and she said: 'I'm so upset about this affair, Nelson, that I don't know if I'm standing on my head or my heels.' But I never saw nothing of the man, sir, and when I asked my lady if she'd met him she called me a fool and said it was too dark to see anything. Which it was, sir."

"On what terms have you servants usually been with the Dowager Lady Ellesmere, Mrs. Nelson?" I asked.

"Well, sir, not what you may call over and above good. Many's the time I would have given warning if it hadn't been for the old master. Her temper's high and she haven't much consideration for her servants. Nor she hadn't for Sir Henry, neither, though he wouldn't hear a word against her. But I for one wasn't surprised when I heard the contents of the will, for I knew he loved his son at heart, though my lady had come so much between them of late years. He never really meant to leave his money away from Master Charles, not for one moment, and my lady, she knew as much too. I've heard her coax him again and again to give her them jewels, but he always made the same answer, that they weren't his to give."

"Is this all you can tell me, Mrs. Nelson?"

"It is all, sir."

"Which of the other servants saw the most of Sir Henry in his last hours?"

"Only Rachel Marks, sir."

"Well, send Rachel Marks to me here."

The old woman courtesied herself out of the room again, and in another minute her place was taken by a bright, rosy-cheeked girl of about twenty, all giggles and blushes,



"ALL GIGGLES AND BLUSHES."

THE RAJAH'S HEIRLOOM.  
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stuffing a corner of her apron in her mouth the while she spoke to me.

"Are you called Rachel Marks?" I begun.

"Oh, yes, sir; but I hope you're not going to write down anything I may say, because I never set eyes on them jewels till my lady called me to her and asked me if they wasn't beautiful, and she said they would be hers as likely as not when Sir Henry died, and all I answered was 'yes,' and I never see them again, sir, as sure as I'm a living woman."

"I am certain you did not. How could you when they were always kept locked away? Have you a young man, Rachel? But I needn't ask the question. You're too pretty a girl to want a beau."

Rachel reddened and smiled.

"It's like your impudence to ask," she replied, with the effrontery with which a pretty woman always feels she can address even a constable of the law; "but of course I have. Haven't you a young woman yourself, now?"

"And you met him on the Tuesday evening following the day you saw the jewels?"

"I'm sure I didn't," said Rachel, opening her eyes. "You ask Mrs. Nelson if I did. Why, I only have every other Sunday out. And Tuesday evening is my time for washing the fine things, and I always do them in her room, so she's the best person to apply to if you want to know where I was on Tuesday evening. But what if I did go out? What do you want to insinuate?"

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," I replied in my pleasantest manner; "and how many more maids are there at the Gables besides yourself?"

"There's only Molly, the kitchenmaid, and Miss Townsend, my lady's own maid, sir; and Molly she's never upstairs and Miss Townsend she's never downstairs, so they didn't hear nothing of the quarrelling and that."

Nevertheless, it was my duty to cross-question them all, which I did, but without eliciting anything satisfactory concerning the loss of the jewels. I next went through the entire house with Sir Charles Ellesmere, carefully examining every place, nook or box where the heirloom might by haphazard be concealed, followed all the time by the dwarf, Julia Crale, who nodded her imbecile head from side to side, and clapped her hands as if she understood what we were saying; but we found no sign or token of

them and I felt convinced they were not in the house. I was reluctantly compelled to tell the baronet that I had been unable as yet to come to any conclusion on the matter, but must ask leave to return to my hotel and take counsel with myself. Meanwhile, he was to see that no one left the Gables, except for a promenade. As soon as I re-entered the hostel I wired to our chief at Scotland Yard: "Cannot trace. Send Crewe up by next train. Want assistance."

My chum arrived true to time and I laid the whole story, as I had gathered it, before him.

#### PART IV.

BEN CREWE was a man of a long head and solid judgment. He thought slowly, but, as a rule, he thought sure, and he generally came to the right conclusion. We had been acquainted ever since we entered the force, and had worked a deal together, and knew each other's methods and ways. I told him everything I had seen and observed, and waited rather anxiously for the remarks that should follow. In my idea there could be no doubt *who* had committed the robbery, but Ben would not give any opinion on the subject.

"You know, Jack," he said, "that you must always give me time to think over things. Let us have a pipe together, and when that's through, maybe I may have seen summat, but it looks dark to me now."

So we sat in the coffee-room of the hotel and smoked together in silence. Ben finished his first pipe and filled another, and sat there, with crossed knees and closed eyes, for all the world like a graven image and about as motionless. I thought he would have never done, but I knew him too well to interrupt his train of thought. At last, after a good hour or more, he opened his eyes, stretched himself, yawned, and said:

"Let's go for a walk and have a look about the place."

It was a wet morning, not at all fitted for a stroll, but I wouldn't gainsay Ben, so we sallied out side by side, and took our way up the village street, until we reached the open country.

"You don't seem to catch on to the idea of a lover, Ben," I ventured to say.

"No, Jack, I don't," he answered briefly.

"Why not?"

"Because no lady would be such a fool as to meet a man as she oughtn't to, in her own grounds and before the eyes of her servants. Mind, I don't say as they haven't done it, and worse things beside, but not such a woman as you describe this Lady Ellesmere, with a determined character and masterful will. If she went to meet the man at all, which I doubt—and you know how servants are always ready to make the worst of everything their employers may do, especially if, as in this case, they don't like them—she went to send him away or warn him off the grounds. Sir Charles told you he believed that a spy was set upon his movements, which, as likely as not, is true. What if this loafer were the spy, and her ladyship, believing the young man was gone for good, went out to pay and dismiss him? It's as likely a notion as not."

"Of course it might be," I answered, in a dissatisfied tone, for I had felt so sure that Ben would fall in with the ideas I had formed concerning the case; "but how, then, do you suppose the jewels were abstracted?"

"Have patience," he replied; "I haven't come to that part of the matter yet."

We were walking along some fields as he spoke, and drawing near to the churchyard where Sir Henry lay buried.

"This is where they put the poor old man," I observed, as we entered the wicket gate. "It's a pity he can't rise again for an hour or two and let us hear what he knows about the affair."

Ben grinned in his queer manner, and we walked to the opposite side of the churchyard, where the baronet was buried. It had been his particular wish—so I had been told—not to be laid in the damp family vault, with his mouldering forefathers, but out in the open space, where the light and sunshine might fall upon his grave. So as yet there was only a mound of earth heaped above his remains, the monument which Sir Charles had ordered to be erected to his memory not being ready. As Ben and I came in sight of the grave, we were startled to see what looked like a bundle laid upon it, but which proved on a nearer inspection to be the figure of the poor dwarf, Miss Craley, who was lying out there all of a heap in the rain.

"Poor creature!" I exclaimed; "they told me her love for the old gentleman was more like that of a dog than a human being, and so it must have been. No one but a dog would have the

fideliity to forget discomfort like this in its grief for the loss of what it loved. But she mustn't lie here. She will catch her death of cold. Here! Miss Craley," I continued, raising my voice, "Miss Craley, you must let me take you home. You must not stay here in the rain."

But I might as well have spoken to the grave itself for all the notice she took of my words.

"Hush!" said Ben, laying his hand on my arm, "this is the poor little humpback you told me of. Let us try and communicate with her. It is an excellent opportunity finding her here alone."

"But she is deaf and dumb," I replied; "she can neither hear nor answer."

"I know the dumb alphabet," said Ben, "and doubtless she knows it too. They have told you that if these jewels were taken from the baronet's bedroom, she must have seen it done, as she was present all the time. Let us try if she can tell us anything about the matter."

"It is useless," I demurred. "If she could talk with her fingers they would have got it all out of her at once."

And the upshot proved I was right. We went up to the grave and touched the dwarf gently on the shoulder. She took no notice at first, but after repeated taps, she raised her head, and I saw that her eyes were swollen with crying. The sight moved me. Poor, unhappy creature! Were her bodily afflictions not enough to bear, that she was called upon to sorrow for the loss of her best friend?

"Mustn't lie here," I said, talking as if she were a little child, and pointing up to the dull sky and down to the damp ground; "you will catch cold—be very sick. Let me take you home," pointing to where the thatched roof of the Gables was visible above the trees. She made some unintelligible reply and shook her shoulder free from my touch, but she did not scream in the painful manner in which I had heard her when in the presence of Sir Charles and Lady Ellesmere. I reiterated my argument, and I saw she watched my lips and gained some knowledge of my meaning, for she shook her head and laid it down again upon the wet clay piled above the grave. Around her and all over the mound were scattered such wild flowers as one can find in late autumn; they looked dragged and wet as herself, and she

had laid on them till they were all crushed and disfigured. "Did you love him?" I asked, pointing downwards to the grave, and making such actions with my lips and hands as to my ideas were emblematic of affection, though Ben told me afterwards that I looked like nothing but the representation of a windmill, and that he had the greatest difficulty to prevent himself bursting out laughing, which would of course have spoiled the whole thing.

I am sure the poor creature understood what I meant, for she gave a low moan like that of a wounded animal, and the tears gushed forth from her eyes again. Suddenly she appeared to be all comprehension, for she sat upright, and gazing up at me, she pointed to her mouth and moaned, then turning to the grave she scratched the earth about with her fingers—turning from the useless task with another moan, and again pointing to her mouth, as though she deplored her inability to speak to us.

"What can she mean?" I said musingly.

Ben made no reply, but I could see from the expression of his face that he was struck by the coincidence, but finding after a while that we could not persuade Miss Craley to leave her position, we strolled away, and turned our steps again towards the village.

"Jack," said Ben presently, "who was the medical man who attended Sir Henry on his deathbed?"

"A Doctor Stone, I believe; a local practitioner."

"Have you interviewed him?"

"No. I didn't see the necessity. Sir Charles told me he had the certificate of death, which said that the old man died of paralysis of the brain."

"I propose that we go and see this Doctor Stone at once."

"Good heavens, man; what have you got in your head now?"

"Only an idea, Jack, raised by the actions of that poor idiot yonder. Did you notice how she pointed to her mouth and then scabbled at the earth above the grave as if she wanted to scratch the body up?"

"And what do you make of that—from an idiot, Ben?"

"Idiots often have more sense than wise men give them credit for. This Miss Craley was in the old baronet's room till he died, you tell me, and saw all that passed, though she has but few means of relating the story. Why should she want to scratch him up again? Why does she associate the idea with

her mouth—with something going into her open mouth? Has she seen anything go into his? Will taking up the body reveal the truth? His death appears to have been a sudden and rather mysterious one. The widow tells you that before the quarrel with his son he was as well and hearty as herself. The son says that he never heard that his father was ill until he received the news of his death. Quarrels, however painful, do not as a rule kill people."

"But the old gentleman had a decided stroke. Goddard, the butler, and Mrs. Nelson bear witness to that."

"I daresay; but strokes do not kill the first time of occurrence, at least, not as a rule; especially when the subject is strong and hearty. I think it is our duty to see the doctor who attended him."

"But we are not trying to find out a case of murder," I objected.

"Well, that's my notion," answered Ben. "But if my head's no good to you, I'd better go back to London."

I didn't like to hear the old boy talk like that, for I had the greatest admiration for his 'cuteness, and faith in his opinion as a rule, though this proposal of his did seem rather unnecessary to me. But Ben Crewe was a strange fellow. Occasionally we others have said amongst ourselves that there was something uncanny about him. He would refuse to see the reason for a thing sometimes when it seemed as clear as day, and then all of a sudden he would start the wonderfulest notion—dream it, as it were, or it came across his mind just like a flash of lightning, without apparent rhyme or reason, but it would prove to be the right thing in the end, and left us all wondering how he had got hold of it. So I had great faith in Ben, even when he seemed most unintelligible, and wouldn't have flown in the face of his wishes for ever so. I told him something of the sort on the present occasion, but he only answered rather gruffly, as though he didn't like it mentioned:

"Never mind where I got it, or if it's my own idea or some one else's. I want to see this doctor and the sooner we go to him the better."

Accordingly we stopped at his house on our way back to the hostel, and were soon ushered into his surgery. Of course he had heard, in common with everybody else, of our presence in



Manningford, and the reason for our being there, and he came into the room with a rather perturbed expression of countenance, as if he hoped he were not going to be mixed up with the affair. I left Ben to be the spokesman, and accordingly he began :

"We have taken the liberty of calling to see you, Doctor Stone, in the interests of justice. There was a robbery committed at the Gables, as doubtless you know all about, whilst the old baronet was lying ill, and whom, we understand, you attended on his death-bed."

"That is true, Mr.— Mr.—" said the doctor.

"Crewe, at your service, sir," interposed Ben.

"Mr. Crewe, thank you ; but I cannot see how my having attended Sir Henry in his last illness can have any bearing on the case. I was only there twice. I cannot possibly know anything about the robbery."

"Perhaps not, sir," replied Ben, "but I conclude you know what Sir Henry died of?"

Doctor Stone looked startled, almost frightened.

"Of course I do. He died of paralysis of the brain ; I gave a certificate to that effect."

"We've heard as much," said Ben. "But are you certain that was the only cause of death?"

"As certain as I am that I sit here, Mr. Crewe."

"And what did it arise from? Lady Ellesmere says the baronet was well and hearty the week before."

"She is right. Sir Henry was a remarkably hale man for his time of life. But he received a terrible shock at the quarrel with his son, and it acted on his system in a deplorable manner. It is not always possible to account for such things. They are attributable to the state of temperament in which they find their victims. Had that quarrel not taken place, Sir Henry might have lasted for the next twenty years ; as it was, it killed him. He never rallied after the attack."

"And nothing else but the shock could have accounted for his symptoms?" inquired Ben.

"I do not understand you, Mr. Crewe."

"Then to put it more plainly, is it quite impossible that the late baronet may have been subjected to foul play—that similar symptoms might not have presented themselves on the administration of a noxious drug, for example?"

"Good God! Mr. Crewe, such an idea never entered my head. Who would have thought of such a thing? Whom do you suspect of so terrible a crime?"

"It is not our business to tell you anything further, Doctor Stone. We came here to ask you a simple question. Could the symptoms shown by the late baronet be produced by the administration of any poison? Will you give us a straightforward answer?"

The doctor was trembling visibly as he replied:

"Well, certainly; there are narcotic poisons the action of which is to paralyze the limbs and speech, and if administered in large quantities would prove fatal to the patient; but, mind you, I am only giving you this information under protest, and without the slightest suspicion that any such drug, or any poisonous matter at all, was given to the late baronet; in fact, I am certain there was not, and that he died a natural death, or else I should not have given the certificate I did."

"We feel assured of that, sir, but in the interests of justice, we are bound to stop at nothing. We intend to demand an exhumation of the late baronet's body, and shall require your assistance in the matter."

The doctor sat down, shaking from head to foot. An exhumation—and of one of his own patients! Such a thing had never been heard of in Manningford before. It would be a scandal—a disgrace—he would have done anything in his power to prevent it.

"Remember, gentlemen," he said, "that this application will be made against my express wishes or consent. You must do it on your own responsibility. I will have nothing to do with the matter. Sir Henry Ellesmere died from a stroke of paralysis and nothing else. It will be iniquitous if he is disturbed from his last repose."

"Oh! it won't hurt him," said Ben cheerfully; "and I don't think we shall need to trouble you any further, sir, either. I've took down your remarks in my little book, and I think they will be sufficient. If not, it's easy to apply to you again. Good morning," and taking a polite leave, we bowed ourselves out of the doctor's premises.

"I can't see the good of this, Ben," I said, as we strolled back to our inn. "Whatever do you want to rake up the old gentle-

man for? If he was murdered, which don't seem likely, it won't help us on with our jewel case. Only going out of the way, I call it, for nothing."

"You bide a bit, Jack," was his reply; "I'm going a little roundabout way, perhaps, but I know what I'm a-coming to. You're such an impetuous fellow. You haven't the patience to see a thing through."

"If I'd stopped as long as you do, to see a thing through," I retorted, "I'd never caught those two rascals, Mears and Allcock, at Chicago."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" cried Ben, and then I felt a bit ashamed of my bragging before a man who was worth two of me. When I understood what Ben would be at, I wanted to interview the little humpback again at once, but he said it wasn't necessary.

"I've got all out of her that I want," he replied. "She struck the match, and the fire is kindling all over me. But this will be a long business, Jack, and we must take Sir Charles into our confidence at once. Let's go on to the Gables."

As soon as we met the baronet, Ben startled me by saying:

"Have you read the certificate of Sir Henry's death, which was written by Doctor Stone, Sir Charles?"

"It is, I believe, in the library drawer with other papers."

"Have you seen it yourself?"

"I have only glanced at it cursorily. I did not arrive here till an hour before the funeral. Lady Ellesmere, my stepmother, received the certificate from Doctor Stone for the benefit of the undertakers, and locked it away immediately afterwards."

"We should like to see it, if you have no objection, Sir Charles."

"None in the world," replied the young man, "that is, if it can be of any possible use to you in tracing my property." And he rang the bell and desired a servant to fetch his bunch of keys off his toilet table.

In a few minutes the certificate was in Ben's hands.

"On what day did the funeral take place?" he asked.

"On the 13th," replied Sir Charles.

"And when was the coffin closed?"

"The day before, I believe," was the answer; "at least my step-mother told me so. At all events, I did not see my father again."

"Why is this certificate, then, dated the 13th, sir? Can you tell me that?"

"I had not noticed that it was, but it may have been because Doctor Stone was called away at the time of my father's death and did not return till the morning of the funeral."

"And consequently did not see the body before giving the certificate," persisted Ben.

"I suppose so. But was that informal? He knew perfectly well what Sir Henry died of. He had seen him at the first, but did not believe in his danger. I know nothing of such matters. I thought it was all right."

"Doubtless, Sir Charles, but Doctor Stone should have known better. However, he has rendered our task easier. Busby and I, we are going to apply for an exhumation of the body."

"What!" exclaimed the baronet in a tone of horror, "you surely do not suspect——"

"We suspect nothing, Sir Charles, but it would be a satisfaction to us to view the body. It's all in the matter of business, sir, and we hope you won't object."

"On the contrary, if there is likely to be any good in it, I shall help you all in my power. What do you intend to do?"

Then I put myself forward.

"With your leave, Sir Charles, I shall stay here," I said, "whilst Crewe goes back to London to make the application. I don't feel that my work is finished; I must take more soundings before I shall be satisfied that the jewels are not still in Manningford."

"I feel convinced they are," chimed in Ben.

Of course, we had not confined our precautions to the place itself. For miles round search had been made at pawnbrokers, and all places where stolen goods were likely to be disposed of—and information of the loss with a description of the article had been sent to every seaport town and principal railway station in the kingdom. But no news of any sort had arrived of it or anything like it. I confess I was beginning to be fairly puzzled, and Ben's behaviour puzzled me still more.

"What in the name of all that's holy," I said to him as soon as we were outside the Gables, "are your plans, Ben? What are you going to do next?"

"You leave that to me, my boy," he replied; "you don't

approve of my action in the matter, so you stick to your own. You shall stay here, and look for the jewels under the beds and in the maids' pockets, and I'll go up to town and get an order for the exhumation of the old gentleman's carcass."

We parted the best of friends, but I really thought he had gone a bit dotty. The old baronet may have been helped out of the world by his missus, for I could see that was what Ben thought, but how would the discovery of murder help us to find the Rajah's heirloom? So I continued to keep a sharp eye on all the inhabitants of Manningford, whilst he was busy with his application to the Home Secretary. These sort of things generally take some time, but at last the order came, and down came Ben with it to Manningford. There was a tremendous scene at the Gables when our intentions were made known. The widow protested against the disturbance of her late husband's remains. She declared it was an outrage and an indecency and she would not allow it. But Ben only winked his eye when she wasn't looking, and assured her sympathetically that she hadn't a voice in the matter, and that Government had a good reason for the demand. The dwarf, Miss Craley, who appeared to have gained some inkling of what was about to happen, seemed delighted at the idea. She capered and screeched all day, constantly making signs with her hands that she wanted the earth removed from the coffin, and then pointing to her own mouth and then to the Dowager Lady Ellesmere, as though she would intimate that *she* had had something to do with her beloved patron being put underground, until I really began to believe myself that Ben was right after all, and the widow had given the old gentleman his quietus. And yet he had treated the idea of a lover with indifference. Aha! I said to myself, Ben may supplement the discovery with another, but he'll find I'm right after all, and that the jewels were taken by her and delivered over to an accomplice—the one, doubtless, who helped her to hasten her husband's death. But the idea of that beautiful face and figure in the dock didn't please me, and I wished Ben hadn't been quite so sharp, but contented himself with looking after the lost property.

The exhumation was carried out very quietly. The coffin was disinterred by night and conveyed to the mortuary chapel, where two medical men, beside Doctor Stone, were prepared to examine it, I and Ben Crewe of course being present, with Sir Charles

Ellesmere. I felt very sad as I watched the proceedings commence. I was thinking of the beautiful widow up at the Gables, and how it would fare with her if Ben's suspicions proved correct. I have rather a soft heart for women ; I can't help it. It seems so terrible to me that they should ever go wrong, when there's so much good in each one of them. As the coffin lid was removed I stepped forward rather curiously to view the corpse. It was that of an attenuated, shrivelled-up old man, with a stern expression. The appearance of the body was almost unchanged by the short time it had been underground, but as the doctors moved it about for the purposes of performing the *post mortem* the stench became unbearable, and I saw Sir Charles turn deadly pale and make a bolt for the outer air. I was about to follow him when I was startled by an exclamation from one of the medical men.

"Why! what is this?" he said, as he took something from under the corpse and held it up. It was a glittering mass of jewels. Ben Crewe and I pounced upon it at the same moment.

"The Rajah's heirloom!" we cried simultaneously.

"But however did it come here?" demanded Doctor Stone curiously.

"I know!" I exclaimed, and "I can guess!" said Ben——  
"*The Dwarf!*"

It proved to be true. Miss Craley, having overheard the old baronet threaten his son with the loss of the heirloom, and the Dowager Lady Ellesmere tell Rachel Marks that the jewels were hers, conceived the cunning idea to secure them for Sir Charles by putting them in the coffin with the corpse, whence they might never have been disinterred had not both Ben and I gone on a wrong tack to find out the truth.

A brief examination proved that Sir Henry had died from natural causes, and the body was re-buried with due solemnity. But we cared little for the failure in that direction; we had unearthed the missing heirloom, and we kept the rest of the secret to ourselves. All our suspicions melted into thin air. Lady Ellesmere had not murdered her husband—she had never had a lover or an accomplice—she had not purloined the jewels—we were almost ready to believe that she had been a devoted wife and step-mother. Sir Charles was delighted with the recovery of his heirloom, the little dwarf screamed with pleasure when she saw it back again, and Ben and I were laden with com-



pliments and congratulations. So ended the robbery of the Rajah's heirloom.

"Ben," I said solemnly, as we wended our way back to Scotland Yard to report proceedings, "Ben, don't you think we had better smooth this matter over a little to the chief? We are considered the two sharpest detectives in London, yet I made sure the dowager had purloined those jewels, and you made sure she had poisoned her husband, but we were both mistaken. I don't understand it; but it is the case, isn't it, now?"

"Hum! Yes," replied Ben thoughtfully, "but we found the jewels, Jack, after all, and that's the main thing."

"True; but now that we are alone, tell me what was it made you first think of exhuming the baronet's body?"

Ben looked very grave.

"I can't tell you, Jack. I don't know myself. But sometimes there comes to me a knowledge—I can't say from *whom* or from *where*, but it fixes itself upon my mind and I can't get rid of it until, rightly or wrongly, I have acted upon it. Don't laugh at me, Jack, but as I stood by the grave with you the first time we saw it somebody said to me, 'Disinter the body!' Most of my lucky hits have come to me in that way. I wouldn't repeat it to everybody, but you'll respect my fancy, old chap, if it is a fancy, and know that, however rum it may seem, I am in earnest in telling it to you."

I looked at rough old Ben, with his shaggy beard and hard features, and thought he was a strange subject to be inspired, from whatever source his information may have come; but he was good and true all through, and if the angels help any one in their earthly work they may have helped him.

But in another hour I was in the little cottage at Fulham, and Nancy and the supper she had prepared for me put everything else out of my head.

## A Woman Outwitted.

By H. L'ESTRANGE MALONE,

Author of "FOOLS TOGETHER" and "TWICE HIT."

I AM not by nature an irritable sort of fellow, but it is enough to upset the temper of a saint to come into violent collision with any one at 8.30 a.m. Breakfast, at the best, in my opinion, is a most dreary performance, and a time for reflection on the events of the preceding day—of opportunities wasted and money ill spent—and these reflections, assisted by greasy bacon and eggs—the less said about the eggs the better—served up in a swimming mass of fat, is calculated to send any one's spirits down to zero. Then can it be wondered at that I used language, which need not be repeated here, when, on opening the door of our sitting-room on a horrible foggy and murky November morning, at the aforesaid time, I was nearly knocked off my legs?

"Look here, Keppel," I said to the partner of my rooms, "I can't and won't stand this sort of thing any longer. Here you have been moping like a sick cat for the last fortnight, and now without the slightest warning you are all up in the sky, treading on air, rushing about like a mad bull without the slightest regard for life or property. What the devil's the matter with you?"

"Matter, Braithwaite? Everything's the matter. Life's a fairy dream this morning. Things are dreadfully lively. Oh, yes, the postman has been. There they all are. Read them, my boy, read them."

"Well, I don't see anything here to make you so confoundedly lively," said I, scanning the contents of several letters that lay strewn about on the breakfast table. "They seem to be all dunning letters. Demands for outstanding bills to be settled immediately, &c., &c."

"Yes, you thick-headed old idiot, that's why I am so jolly. While troubles are impending I'm miserable, simply wretched; but when the deluge comes I laugh. I have them all here under my foot. See! I get them in a heap and tread on the lot of them."

"That being the case, don't you think we might get this detestable meal over?"

"Hang the meal, Braithwaite! I should like to know how you could eat if you had a letter like this."

"Ah! then you have another letter, eh? and from a woman, too."

"Yes, I have kept the tit-bit to the end. Read it."

Taking it up, I read as follows:

"Alderleigh Mansions,

"Flat 2,

"Hyde Park, W.,

"SIR,

"10th November.

"Unless you fulfil your promise to marry me immediately, I shall instruct my solicitors to proceed at once. I will call for your answer to-morrow morning at 12.

"ADA DANECOURT."

"Pheugh! Keppel, you *are* a fool."

"Thanks, old chap; tell me something I don't know. For goodness sake, man, don't stare at me like a Methodist parson, but help me out of this difficulty, or I'm smashed."

"That's just like you fellows. You go deliberately with your eyes wide open and get into a scrape, and then in the coolest manner imaginable ask somebody else to help you out of it."

"Well, it wasn't my fault; she led me on."

"Oh, no, of course not. 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me tempted me and I did eat.' Old story, my boy, dating from the world's foundation. If you want my help, just give me a lucid account of your intrigue with this woman, and don't try to excuse yourself all the time; and jolly well make haste about it, too."

"I'll tell you in as few words as I can, but it will scarcely give you an insight into the whole business."

"Hang it, man, do you think I want an insight into the whole business? Just give me a general outline. You can leave out all the billing and cooing part; I'll take that for granted."

"All right, Braithwaite, don't get excited, or you will not be able to give cool judgment in the matter. Listen.

"Some months ago I was in the Earl's Court Exhibition. It was a bright show and a lovely day. I was enjoying myself immensely, and only lacked one thing—companionship. Yes—

don't look at me like that—female companionship, if you will have it. All nature seemed to demand it; the sky was smiling and bright, and——”

“Stow all that.”

“Just as luck would have it, I made my way towards that infernal great wheel. What they wanted to build such a useless great toy for I can't think.

“In an evil moment I decided to ascend and take a view of smoky London.

“I always had an eye for a pretty face, and perhaps I was more on the alert than usual that afternoon, and I was not long in spotting a stunning fine woman entering one of the cars—by herself. It is perhaps needless to say I followed.”

“Quite,” I muttered drily.

“I tried to make myself as attractive as possible,” went on Keppel, ignoring my interruption, “in making sundry remarks about the exhibition, weather, &c., but all to no purpose; she literally froze the marrow in my bones, and repelled all onslaughts.

“I was just going to give up hope, when the wheel suddenly stopped. We had been revolving for some fifteen minutes, and were now at the summit, and, as I remarked to myself at the time, nearer to heaven than I ever should be.

“Very kind of them, I thought, to enable us to take in fully the splendid view; but when after ten minutes had elapsed and it still showed no signs of moving, it began to get just a trifle monotonous. After half-an-hour had passed by I felt sure that something had gone wrong with the machinery, and I proceeded to communicate this conclusion to my fair companion.

“She was terribly alarmed, to say nothing of the one or two other passengers in the car. I, however, hastened to reassure her, laughing away her fears, and as this broke down the barrier between us, we were soon conversing with the utmost ease. We discussed everybody and everything, and when at last the wheel did begin to revolve again, I took it as a personal injury, especially as compensation in the shape of a crisp fiver was not then in vogue.

“I saw her home, and she asked me to call, which I did many and many a time.”

“Well, of all the fools that ever walked into a trap——” said I.

"I never promised to marry her," went on Keppel excitedly ; "I swear I didn't. Besides, she is not the sort of woman I should choose for a *wife*. The result of our friendship is this letter. I have told you all."

"Ha ! ha ! *friendship*, Keppel. You, a believer in platonic, eh ? Suppose you went after this woman merely for her pleasant companionship. However, I won't dwell on that. You say you have told me all ; you have told me nothing. Who is she ? What is she ? Does she live by herself ? Has she a mother, father or brother ?"

"I don't know ; never troubled to ask."

"Then I repeat that you are —. But, after all, what's the use of telling you unpleasant truths ? I'll see you through for the sake of our friendship, but you must obey me implicitly."

"Only help me out, Braithwaite, and I will do anything you tell me."

"First and foremost go and pack up your trunk. Let me see, she will be here at twelve. You must leave London for Ledbury by the 11.15 train."

"Ledbury ?"

"Yes, you must stop with my uncle there ; I will wire him. For goodness sake don't stare, man. Why the blue, blind blazes don't you do as I tell you ? Thanks, I'll keep her letter and interview her for you, and I'll let you know when you can return safely."

•        •        •        •        •  
"A lady to see Mr. Keppel, sir. Shall I tell her he is out of town ?"

"No, Mrs. Jones. Show her in."

It was quite a common thing for Keppel to receive visitors in our sitting-room, as he was a consulting physician with a small practice, and therefore my landlady showed no surprise in announcing my fair visitor ; and that she certainly was ; a fair stunner, to use a vulgar expression, and I secretly congratulated Keppel on his good taste.

Tall, well dressed and of imposing figure, she stood at the entrance of the room in an expectant attitude.

"Pray be seated, madam," I murmured. Ignoring my remark she said in an icy tone of voice :

"I have called to see Mr. Keppel, sir, and I should be glad if

you would inform him immediately that Miss Danecourt is here and desires to speak to him alone."

"I would execute your mission with all the pleasure in the world, Miss Danecourt, were it possible, but Mr. Keppel is out of town."

I had never before felt uncomfortable in the presence of a woman. Though I am scarcely what is termed a good-looking fellow, I am told that I have a quiet manner of self-assurance which always takes with the fair sex. But this woman quite disconcerted me. I felt myself turning hot and cold under her scrutinizing gaze, and it was a great relief when she at last broke the silence, saying:

"Is not his departure rather sudden? You can answer me frankly as I am a friend of his."

"I am sure, Miss Danecourt," I replied, "that I can rely on your discretion when I tell you that the fact of the matter is, my friend Keppel has got himself into a bit of a scrape. For some time past he has been living rather extravagantly—running up bills, &c.—though I have warned him frequently, to no purpose, that it could only have one ending; but, notwithstanding, he went on recklessly, till at last he was so sorely pressed by his creditors that, to avoid the inevitable smash, he has betaken himself to the wilds of Africa."

Again she fixed me with her piercing eyes and I felt horribly uncomfortable, especially as I knew what a pack of lies I was telling her. However, if I was to get Keppel out of this scrape, cunning must be matched by cunning, and I must say that I believe that it is sometimes necessary to do evil that good may come.

"I posted Mr. Keppel a letter yesterday; as he is not here to receive it, perhaps you will return it to me."

I could see that she was almost beside herself with rage at being baffled of her quarry, but, being a clever woman, she mastered it.

"I am very sorry," I said, "that I must again refuse your request, but Keppel, who anticipated getting nothing but dunning letters, commissioned me to commit all correspondence to the flames unopened. He was a most reticent fellow, and wouldn't have had me read his letters for anything."

Now she seemed in doubt, as if she was wondering how much



of my story was true, and how far I could be trusted. I, however, put on a most innocent expression of countenance, which I am told I can do sometimes, which seemed to lend her confidence.

"The fact of the matter is, Mr. —?"

"Braithwaite," I hastily replied.

"Mr. Braithwaite," she went on, "that I came to consult Mr. Keppel professionally, and my letter to him was to inform him of my coming here to-day. However, as he is away, I will not take up any more of your valuable time, and must thank you for your courtesy."

"Lie number one," I muttered; "she will catch me up yet. Mustn't let her go; she is a dangerous woman, I can see, and will hunt Keppel down, if possible. Wonder if she will fall into my trap."

"Oh, pray don't go yet, Miss Danecourt," I said aloud. "Though I cannot write M.D. after my name, I flatter myself that I am as good as most doctors, having made the study of medicine my especial hobby, and I may be able to render you some assistance if you will kindly describe your symptoms."

I could have laughed aloud at the puzzled expression that came over her pretty face.

"Really, Mr. Braithwaite," she said, "I am not in the habit of consulting quacks."

"Come, don't be too hard on me, Miss Danecourt. If you'll only tell me what is the matter with you, I am sure I shall suggest a much pleasanter remedy than the best doctor in the land."

"Certainly, Mr. Braithwaite, since you will have my ailments forced upon you, I will give you a little list of them, though I fail to see of what interest they can be to you. I suffer so fearfully from headaches and depression that I feel at times as if I could commit suicide; now offer a remedy for that, if you can, sir."

"It is very sad to hear one so young and fair contemplating such an extreme measure, and it would be a crime unparalleled in the annals of history to deprive this slow and monotonous world of one of its brightest ornaments."

A gracious smile was my reward for this gallant speech, and I felt that I was progressing when she remarked:

"I am afraid that you are too flattering, Mr. Braithwaite, and

on that account would advise you strongly to become a member of the medical profession, as your compliments would win many of your patients back to health."

"Ah, that is all very well, Miss Danecourt, but I am of opinion that such a profession would offer too many temptations to a man of my temperament. Allow me to feel your pulse." Suiting the action to the word, I took hold of her delicately formed hand, gently drew off the glove and with the air of a man of practice, felt her pulse.

Perhaps I held her hand longer than was absolutely necessary, but that was all part of the business, and besides the mouse was beginning to nibble at the bait.

"You are suffering from nervous excitement and bothering your head about some stupid little worry," I said, "and though there is nothing really the matter with you now, if you don't make immediate efforts to overcome this nervous excitability the result may be serious. If you will allow me to prescribe for you I should recommend no nauseous medicines of any kind, but plenty of fresh air tempered with as much enjoyment as your purse will allow, providing you don't overdo it. Will you accept this box for the Savoy, to-night? I shall be there myself and will look in upon you."

"You *are* a kind doctor, Mr. Braithwaite, and your remedies simply delightful. Trust me for carrying them out," said she, with a side glance. "I hope you will come and call on us at Alderleigh Mansions; my mother will be delighted to see you."

"Thanks; I shall be very pleased to, and will avail myself of an early opportunity."

Thus ended our first interview. I congratulated myself on having made such good progress and had contemplated a much harder task, but after all some women are easily mastered provided flattery is laid on with a skilful enough brush.

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It is perhaps almost needless to say that I lost no opportunity of cultivating my friendship with Miss Danecourt; indeed, now I had dropped the Miss and substituted Ada, as it was shorter, more convenient and better suited to the intimacy which existed between us.

She was a most charming companion, bright, clever and witty,

and deserved a higher place in the world than that which she really filled—that of a mere adventuress.

However, where women are concerned, and especially women of the world, I am merciless, and perhaps justly so, having myself been cruelly used by one of the so-called gentler sex at a tender age, which so sickened me at the time that I began to regard all of the opposite sex as fair game and each to be knocked down to the highest bidder.

The fallacy of this creed I lived to find out, but that is neither here nor there.

I took every available chance of ingratiating myself into Ada's favour; went everywhere with her; did everything for her; in fact, made myself indispensable, and I really believe she began to care for me. But her scarcely veiled hints about matrimony I studiously ignored, much to her chagrin.

I will not weary you with a detailed account of our various love scenes, sufficient to say that I acted my part well in the matter; in fact, it could scarcely be called acting, because one does not need to feign love-making where a pretty girl is concerned. However, I had gone so far that now there was no turning back, and I was daily expecting a little *billet-doux*, similar to that which was the cause of poor Keppel's precipitate departure from town. Nor was I long kept waiting, for to hasten the end I began to cool down in my attentions toward her, and she in alarm sent me off the following missive, which I enjoyed over my breakfast one bright morning.

"Alderleigh Mansions, Thursday.

"DEAR JACK,

"I must ask you to give me a definite answer about our marriage. The attentions which you have paid me lately can only have one meaning. Indeed, unless you consent to marry me I am compromised. Please, in memory of the many happy hours we have passed together, send a favourable reply to

"Your loving, ADA."

I sat down to the davenport and dashed off a note to this effect:

"2, Orkney Street, W.

"DEAR MISS DANECOURT,

"I am sorry you have taken my intentions seriously. I

should be delighted to take to myself so charming a wife, but my income is too small to permit of such a luxury. I am sure you must be mistaken in thinking that you care for me, and I was of opinion that the pleasant hours that we have passed together sprung from a mutual desire to kill time.

"I am, yours sincerely,

"JOHN BRAITHWAITE."

I dispatched this note by special messenger ; filled my pipe ; sat down and waited.

A couple of hours had scarcely gone by when I received a further missive to this effect :

"SIR,

"All that I have to say in reply to your heartless note is that I have taken legal advice in the matter, and am told that my claim would be supported in a court of law. Will you push me to this extreme ?

"ADA DANECOURT."

I filled up a telegraph form thus :

"Please yourself.—JOHN BRAITHWAITE."

A bomb could scarcely have exploded in quicker time than it took that telegram to do its work, for very shortly afterwards there was a vigorous knocking at the door, and that knock had temper in it. In another moment Ada Danecourt swept into the room, a blaze of dazzling fury.

"Good morning," I said.

"So, sir, this is the end, is it ?" she said, slamming the door.

"It looks to me uncommonly like the *commencement*," I replied, "of a very unpleasant interview, and one which I hope you will bring to a speedy termination."

"Then I will be brief, Mr. Braithwaite ; I haven't come here to mince matters with you. Answer me quickly. Will you marry me, or no ?"

"To be candid, Miss Danecourt, *I will not*."

"Very well, I will wish you a very good morning. You will hear further from my solicitor."

"Stay, please don't hurry away. What about this letter of yours to Mr. Keppel ? I am expecting him back in town to-night, and I am sure you would like to instruct your solicitor to proceed against us *both*. What a sensation it will cause."

Here I stopped short as the expression on my companion's face warned me to go no further. It was simply transfigured with fury, and I thought she was going to strike me.

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Braithwaite," she hissed between her clenched teeth, "I will waste no more words with you now, but the time will come when you will exceedingly regret having outwitted and made an enemy of Ada Danecourt. It may be weeks, months or years, but so surely as there is a devil in hell, so certain will my revenge be, for I swear it."

Shortly after the front door slamming told me she was gone.

"I have made an enemy of a dangerous woman for friendship's sake," I muttered. And I vowed that it would be the last time that I would get a fellow out of a difficulty.

I have lived to receive terrible fulfilment of that woman's vow of vengeance, but I must tell you about that another time.

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## The Unbidden Guest.

By F. B. FORESTER.

"No, sir," the old keeper said reflectively. "I don't know no ghost stories; none as you'd care to hear, that is. But I could tell you of something that happened in these parts once, and it was as strange a thing as any ghost story I ever heard tell on."

I had spent the morning on the moor, grouse shooting, and mid-day had brought me for an hour's welcome rest to the lonely cottage where the old superannuated keeper, father to the stalwart velvet-jacketed Hercules who had acted as my guide throughout the forenoon, lived from year's end to year's end with his son and half-a-dozen dogs for company. The level beams of the glowing August sun bathed in a golden glow the miles of purple moorland lying round us; air and scenery were good to breathe and to look on; and now, as the three of us sat on a turf seat outside the cottage door enjoying the soft sleepy inaction of the afternoon, a question of mine concerning the folk-lore of the district, after which, hardened materialist though I called myself, I was conscious of a secret hankering, had drawn the foregoing remark from the patriarchal lips.

"Let's hear it by all means," said I, lighting my pipe and

settling myself preparatory to listening. A slight grunt, resembling a stifled laugh, came from Ben the keeper.

"You'll have to mind, sir," he put in, a twinkle in his eye. "Dad believes what he's agoing to tell you, every word of it. It's gospel truth to him."

"Ay, that I do," responded the old man warmly. "And why shouldn't I? Didn't I see it with my own eyes? And seein's believin', ain't it?"

"You arouse my curiosity," I said. "Let us have the story by all means, and if it is a personal experience, so much the better."

"Well, sir," began the old man, evidently gratified by these signs of interest, and casting a triumphant glance at his son, "what I've got to tell you don't belong to this time of day, of course. When I says I was a little chap of six years old or thereabouts then, and that I'll be eighty-five come Michaelmas, you'll understand that it must have been a tidy sight of years ago.

"Father, he was keeper on these moors here, same as his son's been after him, and as *his* son"—with a glance of fatherly pride at the stalwart young fellow beside him—"is now, and will be for many years to come, please God. Him and mother and me, the three of us, lived together in just such another cottage as this one, across t'other side of the moor, out Farnington way. The railway runs past there now, over the very place the cottage stands on, I believe; but no one so much as dreamt o' railways time I talk on. Not a road was near, and all around there was nothin' but the moors stretching away for miles, all purple ling and heather, with not a living soul nearer than Wharton, and that was a good twelve miles away. It was pretty lonely for mother, o' course, during the day; but she was a brave woman, and when dad come home at night, never a word would she let on to tell him how right down scared she got at times and how mortally sick she felt of hearing the sound of her own voice.

"'Been pretty quiet for you, Polly,' dad would say at night sometimes, when the three of us would be sitting round the fire, with the flame dancing and shining on the wall and making black shadows in all the corners.

"'Ye-es, so, so,' mother would answer, kind of grudging like, and then she'd start telling him what she'd been about all day, or something as I'd said or done, so as to turn his attention, you



see, sir. And as a woman can gen'rally lead a man off on whatever trail she likes to get his nose on, dad would never think no more about it; and as for mother and me being that lonely, when he and the dogs were all away, why, I don't suppose the thought of it ever entered his head. So, what with her never complaining, and that, dad grew easier in his mind, and once or twice, when he'd be away at the Castle late in the afternoon, he'd even stay there overnight.

"Well, sir, one day when dad comes home to get his dinner he tells mother as how there's a lot of gentlemen come down from London for the shooting, and as he'd got orders to be on hand bright and early next morning, the meaning of that being that he'd have to spend the night at the Castle. Mother didn't say much; 'twasn't her way to carry on when she knew a thing couldn't be helped, and dad went on talking.

"'To-morrow's quarter-day, Polly, and you've got our rent all right for the agent when he comes. Put this along wi' it, lass, it's Tom Regan's, and he's asked me to hand it over for him and save the miles of walking.'

"I don't know what come to mother, whether something warned her, or what, but she give a sort of jump as dad spoke.

"'Oh, Jim,' says she, all in a twitter, 'you're never going to leave all that money here, and you away, and the child and me all alone. Can't you—can't you leave one of the dogs?'

"Dad stared at her. 'No,' he says, 'I can't, more's the pity. They're all wanted to-morrow, and I've sent them on to the Castle. Why, Polly, lass, what's come to you? I've never known you take on like this before.'

"Then mother, seeing how troubled and uneasy he looked, plucked up heart and told him, trying to laugh, never to mind her—she had only been feeling a bit low, and it made her timid like. But dad didn't laugh in answer, only said very grave that if he'd ha' known she felt that way, he'd have took good care she wasn't ever left alone overnight. This should be the last time, he'd see to that, and anyhow he'd take the rent money with him and wouldn't leave it to trouble her. Then he kissed her, and kissed me, and went off, striding away over the moors towards Farnington—the sunset way I called it, 'cause the sun set over there; and I can see him, big and tall like Ben here, moving away among the heather till we lost him at the dip of the moor.

And I mind how, just before we saw no more of him, he pulled up and looked back, as if mother's words stuck to him, somehow, and he couldn't get them out of his mind.

"Mother seemed queer and anxious all that afternoon. Long before dusk she called me in from playing in the bit of garden in front of the door, and shut and barred it closely, not so much as letting me stand outside to watch the sunset, as I always liked to do. It was getting dark already, the shadows had begun to fall black and gloomy all round the cottage, and the fire was sending bright dancing gleams flickering up the wall, when I hears a queer, scratching, whining noise at the door

"Mother was putting out the tea-cups, and she didn't hear it, at first. But I, sitting in front of the fire, heard it well enough, and I tumbled off my stool and ran to the door to get it open, for I thought I knew what it was. But mother had pulled the bar across at the top and I couldn't stir it.

"'There's something at the door that wants to come in,' I says, pulling at it.

"'There ain't nothing of the sort,' says mother shortly, and goes on putting out the tea. 'Let the door alone.'

"'Yes, there is,' I says. 'It's a dog. It's Nip, or Juno,' meaning the brace of pointers that dad had usually in the kennels outside.

"Then mother, thinking that perhaps dad had found that one of the dogs could be spared after all, and had told it to go home, went to the door and opened it. I had been right and wrong too, for on the doorstep there was standing a large black dog.

"My word! but he was a beautiful creature, sir, the finest dog I ever set eyes on. Like a setter in the make of him, but no setter that ever I saw could match him in size or looks. His coat was jet-black, as glossy as the skin of a thoroughbred, with just one streak of white showing down the breast, and his eyes—well, they were the very humanest, sir, that ever I see looking out of a dog's face.

"Now mother, although she had expected to find a dog outside, hadn't dreamt of anything except one of ourn, and she made like to shut the door on him. But the creature was too quick for her. He had pushed his head through before she knew it, and she scarcely saw how, or even felt the door press against her before he had slipped past and was in the room.

"Mother was used to dogs, and hadn't no fear of them, but she didn't altogether like strange ones, you see, sir, me being such a child and all; and her first thought was to put the creature out. So she pulled the door wide open and pointed to it, stamping her foot and saying, 'Be off! Go home.'

"It was all very well to say that, but the dog wouldn't go. Not a step would he budge, but only stood there, wagging his tail and looking at her with them beautiful eyes of his, as were the biggest and beautifulest and softest I ever see in dog before or since. She took up a stick then, but his eyes were that imploring that she hadn't the heart to use it; and at last, for the odd kind of uneasiness that had hung about her ever since dad had gone was on her still, and the dog was a dog and meant protection whatever else it might be, she shut the door, barred it across, and said to me that we would let it stop.

"I was delighted, of course, and wanted to make friends at once; but the queer thing was that the dog wouldn't let me touch him. He ran round under the table and lay down in a corner of the room, looking at me with his big soft eyes and wagging his tail, but never coming no nearer. Mother put down some water, and he lapped a little, but only sniffed at a bone she threw him and didn't touch it.

"It was quite dark by this time, and mother lit a candle and set it on the table to see to have tea by. Afterwards she took her knitting and sat down by the fire, and I leaned against her, nodding and half asleep. The dog lay in the corner furthest from us, between the fireplace and the wall; and I'd forgotten altogether about him, when mother looks up sudden. 'Bless me,' says she, 'how bright the fire do catch the wall to-night. I haven't dropped a spark over there, surely.' And up she gets and crosses over to t'other side to where the firelight was dancing and flickering on the cottage wall.

"Now, sir, whether it was no more than just the light catching them, mind you, I can't say. I only know that as mother come to the corner where that dog was a-lying, and he lifted his head and looked at her, his eyes were a shining with a queer lamping sort of light, that seemed to make the place bright all round him. But it wasn't till afterwards that she thought of it, for at that moment there came a sudden sharp knock at the door.

"My eye! how mother jumped; and I see her face turn white.

For in that lonely out-of-the-way place we never looked for visitors after dark, nor in the day time, many of 'em ; and the sound of this knock now give her quite a turn. Presently there come a faint voice from outside asking for a crust of bread.

"Mother didn't stir for a moment, for the notion of unbarring the door went against her. The knock came a second time.

"'For pity's sake—for the sake of the child,' the voice said again, pleading like.

"Now, mother was terrible soft-hearted, sir, whenever children were concerned, and the mention of a child went straight home to her heart. I see her glance at me, and I knowed the thought passing through her mind, as after a moment's pause she got up, stepped across the room and unbarred the door. On the step outside stood a woman with a baby in her arms.

"Her voice had sounded faint-like, but there was nothing in the fainting line about her when she had got inside, for she come inside quick enough the moment mother had unbarred the door. She looked like a gipsy, for her face was dark and swarthy, and the shawl round her head hid a'most all but the wild gleam of her eyes ; and all the time she kep' on rock, rocking that child in her arms until I reckon she must have rocked all the crying out of it, for never a word come from its lips. She sat down where mother pointed, and took the food she was given, but she offered nothing to the child. It was asleep, she said, when mother wanted to look at it.

"Yes, she was a gipsy, and on the tramp across the moor she had missed her way in the fog ; for there was a heavy fog coming up. 'How far was it to Farnington? Twelve miles? She'd be thankful to sit and rest by the fire a bit, then, if mother would let her.' And without waiting for yes or no, she turned round and put the child out of her arms down on the settle at her back. Then she swung round again and sat staring with her black eyes at the fire. I was sat on my stool opposite, and child-like, I never so much as took my eyes off her, wondering at her gaunt make, the big feet in the clumsy men's boots that showed beneath her skirts, and the lean powerful hands lying in her lap. Seems she didn't altogether like me watching her, for after a bit she turns on me and asks :

"'What are you staring at, you brat?'

"'Nothin,' says I.

"Then if you wants to look at nothin,' says she with a short laugh, 'you can go and stare at the kiddy there, not at me.' And she jerked her head towards the settle, where the baby was a-lying.

"Ah, poor little thing,' says mother, getting up, 'it don't seem natural for it to lie there that quiet. I'll bring it to the fire and warm it a drop o' milk.'

"She bent down over the baby and was just about to take it in her arms, when she give a scream that startled me off my stool, and stood up, her face as white as death. For it was nothing but a shawl or two rolled round something stiff and heavy as was lying on the settle, and no child at all.

"I was a-looking at mother, and I had no eyes for the woman until I see mother's face change and an awful look of fear come over it. And when I turned to see what she was staring at with them wild eyes, the woman had flung off her shawl and the wrap she wore round her head, and was stood up with a horrid, mocking smile on his face. For it was no woman, sir, as you'll have guessed, but a man.

"Well, mistress,' he says, coming forward a pace or two, 'I didn't mean to let the cat out of the bag so soon; but what's done's done. There's a little trifle of rent money put by for the agent, as I've taken a fancy to; and that's what's brought me here. If you hand it over quietly, so much the better for you; if not . . . I'm not one to stick at trifles; I've come for that money, and have it I will.'

"I have not got it,' mother said, plucking up what heart she could, and speaking through her white and trembling lips.

"That don't go down with me,' said the fellow with an oath. 'I didn't sleep under the lee of Tom Regan's hayrick for nothin' last night, and I heard every word that was spoken between him and your Jim. You'd better tell me where you've got it stowed, or you'll be sorry for it. You're a woman, mind you, and alone.'

"Mother's lips went whiter than ever, but she said never a word. I had begun to cry.

"Hold your row, you snivelling brat,' the fellow said with a curse. 'Come, mistress, you'd best not try my patience too long.'

"Now, mother was a brave woman, as I've said, and I don't believe, if the money had been left in her charge, as she'd have

given it up tamely and without so much as a word. But of course, as things were, she could do no more than say, over and over again, as she hadn't got it. Then the brute began to threaten her, with threats that made her blood run cold; for she was only a woman, sir, and alone, except for me, a child as could do nothing in the way of help. With a last horrid threat on his lips the fellow turned towards the settle—there was a pistol hid in the clothes of the sham baby we found out afterwards—when he was stopped by something as come soft and noiseless out of the corner beyond and got right in his way. I see what it was after a minute. Between him and the settle where the pistol was lying there was standing that dog.

"The creature had showed neither sight nor sound of itself since the woman had come in, and we'd forgotten about it altogether, mother and me. There it stood now, though, still as a stone, but all on the watch, the lips drawn back from the sharp white teeth, and its eyes fixed, with a savage gleam in them, on the fellow's face. I was nothing but a child, and no thought of anything beyond had come to me then; but I tell you, sir, child as I was, I couldn't help feeling that the grin on the creature's face had something more than dog-like in it; and for nights to come I couldn't get the thought of it out of my head.

"Our visitor looked a bit took aback when he saw the creature, for most of his sort are terrible feared of a dog. But 'twas only for a moment, and then he laughed right out.

"'He's an ugly customer, but he won't help you much, mistress,' he said with a sneer. 'I've something here as'll settle *him* fast enough.' With that he stretched out his hand towards the bundle on the settle.

"The hand never reached it, sir. You know the choking, worrying snarl a dog gives before he springs to grip his enemy by the throat, the growl that means a movement—and death! That sound stopped the scoundrel, and kept him, not daring to stir hand or foot, with the dog in front of him, never moving, never uttering a sound beyond that low threatening growl, but watching, only watching. He might have been armed with a dozen weapons, and it would have been all the same. Those sharp, bared fangs would have met in his throat before he could have gripped the pistol lying close to him; and he knew it, and the knowing of it kept him there still as a



stone, with the dog never taking its watching, burning eyes from his face.

" 'I'm done,' he owned at last, when minutes that seemed like hours had gone by. 'I'm done this time, mistress, thanks to the dog-fiend you've got here. I tell you I'd not have stopped at murder when I come in; but that kid of yours could best me now. Make the devil brute take his eyes off me, and let me go.'

"All trembling, like a leaf, mother got to the door and drew back the bar. The fellow crossed the kitchen and slunk out, and the dog went with him. It followed him with its nose close at his knee as he crossed the threshold, and the two of them went like that, out into the fog and over the lonely moorland into the night. We never saw nor heard of the dog again.

"There were gipsies in the neighbourhood, crossing the moor out Wharton way, and when the story got about folk told us as 'twas known they had some strange-looking dogs with them, and said that this one must have belonged to the lot. But mother, she never believed in nothin' of the sort, and to the day of her death she would have it as the creature had been sent to guard her and me from the danger that was to come to us that night. She held that it was something more than a dog, sir, and you see there was one thing about it uncommon strange. When dad come back that next morning, our two pointers, Nip and Juno, followed him into the cottage. But the moment they got inside a sort of turn came over them, and they rushed out all queer and scared; while as for the water mother had set down for the black dog to drink, there was no getting them to put their lips to it. Not thirsty, sir? Well, sir, seeing as there warn't no water within six mile or so, and they'd come ten miles that morning over the moor, you'll excuse me saying you don't know much about dogs if you reckon they warn't thirsty.

"Coincidence you say, sir? Well, I dunno the meaning of that—maybe it's a word you gentles gives to the things you can't explain. But I've told you the story just as it happened, and I'd swear it's true anyhow. If a gentleman like you can't see daylight in it, t'aint for the likes of me to try; but I sticks to it that, say what folks will, the thing was uncommon strange. . . . Not tried the west side, haven't you, sir? Bless your heart, Ben, what be you a-thinking of? The birds are as thick as blackberries down by the Grey Rock and Deadman's Hollow."

"That's a gruesome name," I said, rising and lifting my gun while Ben coupled up the brace of dogs. I noticed a glance exchanged between father and son as the younger man lifted his head.

"Yes, sir," responded the former quietly; "the morning after that night I've been telling you of, the body of a man was found down there, and that's how the hollow got its name. Mother, she knew him again the moment she set eyes on the dead face, for all he'd got quit of the woman's clothes; and there warn't no mark nor wound on him, to show how he'd come by his death. Oh, yes, sir; I ain't saying as the fog warn't thick that night, nor as how it wouldn't have been easy enough for him to ha' missed his footing in the dark; though to be sure there were folks as would have it 'twarn't *that* as killed him. . . . Good-day to you, sir, and thank you kindly. Ben here'll see to your having good sport."

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

It was vexing to find so much gross superstition still extant in this last decade of the nineteenth century, certainly. Yet for all that, and though the notion of a spook dog was something too much for the materialistic mind to swallow, there is no use denying that, as I stood an hour later in Deadman's Hollow, with the recollection of the weird story I had just heard fresh in my memory, I was conscious of a cold shiver, which all the strength of the August sunshine, bathing the moorland in a glow of gold, was quite unable to lessen or to drive away.

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## "The Bug of the Bear."

A TALE OF A "LETTRE DE CACHET."

By LUCY HARDY.

M. LE COMTE DE BRIE was looking disconsolately out of his prison windows one fine spring morning in the year of grace 1764. The apartment in which the young noble was confined was comfortably furnished; indeed, the Château, which played in the "province" the part which the Bastille took in Paris, viz., that of a place of safe custody for political offenders as well as for actual criminals, was not a disagreeable abode; or, rather, would not have been so to an inmate free to go in and out of its precincts at will. But the pleasant green courtyard on which De Brie was now gazing was flanked and guarded by lofty walls and locked gates; and comfortable, even luxurious as were the appointments of the spacious apartment, iron bars crossed the windows, and the door was bolted on the outside. Why M. de Brie came to be in the enjoyment of the royal hospitality at the Château is a matter regarding which we cannot enlighten the reader; even the person most concerned—the prisoner himself—was never, to the end of his life, informed on this subject. That he owed his abrupt incarceration to a *lettre de cachet* he was of course aware; but who procured this letter, or why it was issued against him, remained for ever a mystery. Nothing, unfortunately, was easier than to become the victim of such a "letter" during the days of Louis le Bien Aimé and many of his predecessors. De Brie might have spoken slightly in public concerning the reigning sultana. Mme. de Pompadour was vindictive, and careless words uttered in the provinces might have travelled to the ears of the favourite in Paris, growing, like rolling snowballs, by their journey; or the young count may have had enemies who possessed court influence, and the "letter" have been procured by some envious neighbour, perhaps even by some slighted rival—for De Brie had been married but a few months to a fair young bride, to whom (albeit the marriage had

been duly "arranged" by the families on both sides) the bridegroom had the unfashionable bad taste to be very deeply attached, an attachment more than reciprocated by the bride. Of course, for a husband and wife to acknowledge devoted affection for each other was a sin against all the canons of good taste in fashionable circles in France at this epoch. Has not "Madame" (Charlotte Elizabeth of Orleans) made this very clear in her delightfully candid "Memoirs of the Court of Louis Quatorze?" But in excuse for the De Bries it must be urged that they were but provincial nobles after all, young and unsophisticated, who had never enjoyed the advantages of a Parisian education, nor been admitted to the court circle. Mme. de Brie being, as we have said, beautiful and attractive, it may be that her husband's incarceration was the work of some rival, who proposed to himself the pleasing task of attempting to convert the bride from her absurd *bourgeoise* affection for the husband whose absence might be practically indefinite, and for whom it was therefore manifest folly to be weeping, as Marie was doing at present in her solitary home. The two had been so perfectly, completely happy for those first sweet months of their wedlock, and then suddenly, like a bolt from a summer sky, had come the arrival of that awful, mysterious "letter," and De Brie, ignorant of his crime, had been hurried away to the frowning Château above the town, there to remain, weeks, months, years—who could tell? There were grey-haired prisoners found in the Bastille at the time of its demolition, who had entered its precincts as young as De Brie, and as ignorant of their supposed offences; there were legends of persons arrested "in mistake" and forgotten, and left for years in their prisons.\*

It is needless to dwell upon an oft-told story, of which all contemporary memoirs (notably those of two very outspoken ladies, the Duchess of Orleans in the seventeenth, and Mme. du Barri in the eighteenth century) give numberless instances. Mme. de Pompadour is credited with being peculiarly cruel in her use of the fatal, readily procurable "letters;" by which an enemy could be punished by perpetual imprisonment, or a too fascinating rival quietly removed from her path. There were some drawbacks to life in "la belle France" in the days of the old régime.

\* Mme. du Barri relates a case of a young girl thus sacrificed in Paris.

One circumstance alleviated the miseries of the victims of the *lettres de cachet*; the "dungeon and straw" of popular tradition was seldom their portion. As a rule, the prisoners admitted by virtue of these "letters" were treated, as regards their material comforts, rather as guests than captives, and supplied with food and lodging suitable to their rank. Seventeenth and eighteenth century memoir writers, who had, in some cases, made personal trial of the Bastille hospitality, often record this fact, occasionally (with true French appreciation of the skill of a *chef*) speaking with special approval of certain of the prison dishes. But gilded wires do not reconcile a bird to its cage, and De Brie was not to be consoled by a comfortably furnished apartment and cunningly flavoured ragoûts for the loss of his liberty—and his wife. As he now looked idly from his window he thought sadly of how this would end. Marie, he knew, would spare neither pains nor bribes to win his freedom, but three months had elapsed since his entry into the Château and no word or sign had come of release. This looked ill—as if some malign influence were at work against him in high quarters. And then, the young man remembered Marie and her beauty—beauty which others besides himself had surely noted—and gnashed his teeth as he thought of her now, alone and unfriended, exposed to the temptations, the blandishments, nay, even to the downright violence of rival suitors. Who could say that she might not be kidnapped away while he, her rightful protector, was thus absent from her side? or might not some honey-tongued courtier work upon the girl's inexperience and at last win her to forget the claims of the husband now consigned to a living grave? Such thoughts stung like scorpions, and De Brie was glad when the sound of a pipe and tabor in the courtyard broke upon his gloomy reflections. In the monotonous life of a prisoner even small distractions are welcome, and De Brie surveyed with interest a group which had just entered the courtyard below him, a man and a boy, accompanied by a bear, led by a chain, and a couple of dancing dogs. The boy beat the tabor and the man struck up a lively tune, to which the dogs danced merrily, while the bear shifted heavily from one foot to the other. Like the other animals Bruin was attired in a fantastic costume, a scanty coloured petticoat, a scarf twisted about its body, and a huge cap, such as the peasant women wore, tied over its head and concealing all its visage save its snout. The

beast appeared of a surly nature, for its owner kept a firm grasp on its chain, while ever and anon the brute uttered a low growl, which made the spectators fall back to a respectful distance. The courtyard was quickly filled with the Château servants and warders, eager, like the man who had permitted the mountebanks to enter, to snatch a little surreptitious amusement. Somewhat careless guard was kept at this local Bastille, whose solitary prisoner was safe under lock and key. The nominal governor of the Château was an aged man, deaf and partly blind, who slept away great part of the day in his cushioned chair, and although his son resided with him and was supposed to supply his father's deficiencies, M. de Vienne the younger was a devoted sportsman and pleasure-seeker, and oftener to be found without the Château walls than within them. On this special afternoon the old governor was asleep as usual, and the young one safe away till nightfall, consequently discipline within the fortress much relaxed, and the warder at the castle gate had been easily cajoled into admitting the itinerant performers into the courtyard to delight the domestics of the castle with their music and antics. Even M. de Brie gazed with some interest on the troupe below, and desired to view them at closer quarters. He was permitted to walk in the courtyard at intervals, and now rapped on his door to call the attention of a warder stationed in the passage to his desire to descend to the courtyard.

"Monsieur will give his parole not to attempt to communicate with the men?" said the gaoler suspiciously, divided between a strong desire to descend himself (under cover of guarding the prisoner) and usual professional caution.

"I am not at all desirous of communicating with such *canaille*," said De Brie haughtily, having, in truth, no motive for his wish to go down to the courtyard save that of a prisoner's idle interest in even the most trifling occurrence which broke the dull monotony of the day.

"Monsieur shall be gratified; we will descend together," said the gaoler with obliging promptitude; and, closely followed by the warder, De Brie entered the grassy courtyard and leant against the wall at some distance from the mountebanks; while the dogs danced again, and the man told fortunes by cards and cut jokes amid the approving laughter and encouragement of the on-lookers.



"But, your bear, *maitre*, what does she do?" cried one of the servants.

"Oh, my poor Pierrette," replied the man, "she is not in the sweetest of tempers to-day; she is a great lady, *voyez vous*, and has her little caprices. I think her chain is strong" (here the foremost spectators rapidly fell back), "but I dare not irritate her—any more than I dare my wife. Yet, my sweet Pierrette, lady fair, wilt thou not give one little dance, just one little step to please all these good people? Ay," as the bear gave a smothered growl and shifted clumsily from side to side, "that is well—charmingly done."

"Is that the most your beast can do to earn its meat?" cried a scullion scoffingly.

"Nay," replied the man quickly, "Pierrette, my masters, has as keen a knowledge of rank and quality as the king's own chamberlain. My dainty little lady, point out to me amid this assemblage the person of the lowest rank and of most brutal manners."

The bear made a sudden lunge forward and planted its paws on the shoulders of the terrified scullion, amid the laughter and applause of his fellow-servants.

"Très bien, belle amie," said her master, jerking off the animal by its chain, "and now indicate me the personage of highest rank, of noblest bearing, in the company."

The bear seemed to hesitate for a moment, then, by a sudden movement, pulled its chain out of its owner's hand, lumbered heavily across the grass towards De Brie, and fairly clasped him in its "hug" before the startled spectators could interpose.

"Mille et mille pardons, monseigneur," cried the agitated owner of the brute, dashing up and clutching at its chain. "Ah, *vilaine bête*, thus to insult a noble gentleman. I trust, monseigneur, that my bear's hug, the poor foolish brute's only way of indicating the lofty rank of the noble whom she was bidden to discover, has not incommoded your highness; Pierrette meant no ill, believe me."

"And she has done no ill," said De Brie good-humouredly, "save for casting some dust on my cloak. Here, good fellow, is something to buy wine for thyself and thy lad; and in future teach thy wise bear that she can indicate the rank even of a noble without attempting to throttle him in the process."

"I am overwhelmed by the goodness of monseigneur," said the man, bowing low, as he took the coin which De Brie tendered him; and the young count signed to his attendant that he was ready to leave the courtyard and return to his prison.

Ready indeed, for a marvellous thing had occurred. As the bear clasped him in its clumsy embrace a tiny scrap of paper had been pressed from its paw into his hand, and a voice—a *human* voice—had whispered in his ear, "Read." The brute's unexpected onslaught upon De Brie had momentarily scattered all the spectators to a respectful distance; and the count had, with all a prisoner's ready quickness and intuition, conveyed this tiny scrap of paper to his pocket unseen even by the watchful warder. When safe and alone in his apartment he eagerly perused the tiny billet.

"Feign yourself slightly ill and keep your chamber for a few days," ran the letter. "In less than a week the bear will be here again; request to see it in your own apartment."

There was no address nor signature to the brief epistle, but De Brie guessed that some friendly scheme was on foot for his good. He obeyed the directions received, carefully destroying (by the simple expedient of chewing and swallowing it) the tiny bit of tissue paper which had so strangely reached him. An alleged slight chill, professedly contracted while lounging in the courtyard the previous day, was made the prisoner's excuse for keeping his chamber, and even his alcoved bed, for great part of the next few days; although De Brie declined to call in the doctor (distant some half dozen miles), on the ground that he was subject to these slight feverish attacks, and that a day or two's rest invariably cured him.

"Although it is sadly dull and *ennuyant* to lie here all day," remarked the captive to the warder, who had brought him the meagre provisions which the captive, to keep up appearances, had requested might be substituted for his usual succulent mid-day repast.

"Monsieur is not worse off than other folks," said the attendant surlily. "Here is M. de Vienne, our young master I mean, off to a grand wedding *fête* to-day and half the castle folks with him; while I am left here, *ma foi*, to lock doors and carry broth to sick rooms. If monsieur is *ennuyé* I am equally so."

"I would you and I had some *divertissement*, my good fellow," said De Brie; "even that mountebank fellow's performance were better than nothing to pass away the idle hours."

"And here—that it should so happen—is the very man and his bear in the courtyard," exclaimed the warder, pressing closer to the casement. "*Peste* on these bars!—one cannot see out clearly for them."

"So I often find," said De Brie quietly.

"Monsieur does not feel disposed to descend again to the courtyard to view the brute's antics," suggested the warder, who was dying to behold the performances again himself.

"What, I, my good friend? I arise out of my sick bed on a chilly spring afternoon and risk a fresh cold!"

"They are all there," grumbled the warder enviously, "and—yes, it is so—the *bear* is to-day telling fortunes by the cards. She puts her paw on one and indicates."

"My worthy friend," said the invalid from behind the bed-curtains, "though I am too unwell to risk the chilly air, I should have no objection to the bear giving a performance here, in my chamber, before us both."

"Impossible, monsieur; it is strictly forbidden to give any one access to you."

"As you will," said De Brie with a yawn, "I spoke rather for your sake than my own. I should have thought a bear's antics at the further end of my apartment a harmless proceeding enough, but in truth I have little personal wish for its presence."

Jean hesitated; he had an ardent desire to have his own fortune read by the cards; and, after all, what possible harm could come of the bear's presence, or who indeed need know of its having been introduced into the prisoner's apartment?

Muttering some half audible sentences, the warder left the room; after about a quarter of an hour he returned smiling, leading the bear by its chain.

"Madame Pierrette is in a heavenly temper to-day," he explained, "so this makes all easy. Monsieur will observe that I only admit the *animal*, not her *master*, to his apartment, therefore I break no prison rules." (Query, would M. de Vienne have quite echoed this sentiment?) "Now, *ma belle dame*," continued the man, prudently attaching the end of the animal's chain to the window bars, "show monsieur how cleverly you can read the

cards; it was truly amazing, monsieur, to see her performances below."

But the bear, though it stood meekly enough on its hind legs beside the window, seemed disinclined to recommence its performances.

"Her master said it might be that she would need a cup of wine before she would begin again," remarked the warder; "the jade costs him as much in liquor as a Christian would drink, he swore."

"A bear drink wine—nay, I would believe that if I saw it done," said De Brie quickly. "Here, honest fellow," flinging him a coin, "bring a flagon of good wine, and cups for the bear and thyself."

"Monsieur is good, and the bear is quite safely fastened," said the man, picking up the money with an awkward bow and quitting the room, heedfully fastening the door behind him." In another moment the supposed bear had disengaged itself from its fastening, and with a whisper, "Husband—my life—my own," was clinging to his neck.

"Quick, quick, and be silent," whispered Marie (for she it was), as she hastily stripped off the shaggy hide, the fantastic drapery, the well-made mask which so cleverly simulated the bear's head and snout, and which the frilled cap and kerchief almost concealed. It was but the work of a few moments to array her husband (who was a slightly built man about her own height) in her own late disguise, to refasten the chain to the window and to spring herself into the alcoved bed shrouded by curtains. De Brie would have protested against this exchange of prisoners, but was silenced by Marie's peremptory whisper, "Leave all to me—all shall be well."

A heavy footstep lumbering upstairs told that the warder was returning with the wine; as he opened the door a violent fit of coughing broke from the supposed invalid in the bed.

"You are welcome to the wine, good fellow," said a stifled voice between the paroxysms of the cough; "but—ugh, ugh, I find that I myself am too weary to behold the sport with the bear. Take the beast down to the courtyard and divert the servants with her antics, and on the table is a gold piece which thou mayst divide between thyself and his owner for thy pains."

"Monsieur is generous, and doubtless rest will be best for

him," said Jean, who was now ready enough to depart, and who failed, in the cough-disguised tones, to detect that the speaker's voice was that of a *woman*. De Brie lumbered along after his leader, wondering how he should support his disguise when he was called upon to give a performance below; but on entering the courtyard his chain was caught by the bear's owner, who swore, by all the saints, that he could tarry no longer, being pledged to give an exhibition of the animal's powers at a distant inn, and being already late for this engagement.

"To humour the sick gentleman I waited awhile, but not another moment can we stay," asseverated the mountebank; and, as he readily waived his claim to any portion of the piece of gold (on the principle of "no play, no pay"), Jean was willing enough to permit the man and bear to depart as they desired.

Hurrying away through the adjacent woods, De Brie and his leader found themselves at length at a charcoal burner's cottage, and here explanations ensued, while the count was stripped of his disguise and the bear's skin and trappings safely buried in a deep pit already prepared to receive them, over which a stock of charcoal was then stacked.

It was to his bride's loving ingenuity that De Brie owed his escape. The charcoal burner's wife had been the young countess's foster-mother, the itinerant bear leader her *frère de lait*; and, as was customary in France at that time, Marie had never lost sight of these humble connections. The charcoal burner's wife was a regular pensioner of her quondam nursling, the bear leader welcomed at Marie's house when he passed near it in the course of his strolling tours. It was the appearance of this humble friend, ignorant of the trouble which had fallen upon her, and only expecting to congratulate the newly-wedded bride, which had suggested to Marie the ingenious expedient by which she effected her husband's escape. She knew she might count upon the absolute devotion of her foster kindred; the old pair at the charcoal burner's hut, the bear leader, and the boy, his son. Jacques' poor Bruin was promptly sacrificed, and his skin used to form Marie's disguise. We have seen how this device succeeded. Marie's thoughtful care had also provided a pair of swift horses waiting behind the charcoal burner's hut, on which De Brie and his rescuer, the latter attired as a lacquey, were soon speeding away to the distant abode of some reliable friends,

where they would be safely *perdu* for a while. But as imprisonment in virtue of a *lettre de cachet* was usually rather the result of some private spite than the execution of public justice, it was not likely that pursuit would be very hot after the fugitive.

So in fact it proved. When Messieurs de Vienne, the father and son, learnt how their prisoner had escaped, there was not a little consternation in the Château, particularly as the exchange of captives was not discovered till the morning after De Brie's successful evasion. But both the governors, being gentlemen, were incapable of treating Marie with aught save the most chivalrous respect and courtesy; and although the young conspirator was detained at the castle "till the king's pleasure should be known," her captivity was that of an honoured guest of kindly entertainers; her heaviest labour being that of playing tric-trac in the evening with the old gentleman, who seemed to grow younger in the sunshine of her presence, and who vied with his son in paying her the most elaborate compliments, after the fashion of the day. In their secret hearts, perhaps, both the owners of the Château admired Marie none the less for her ingenious rescue of her husband; of whose offence his custodians were as ignorant as himself, and ever remained so. The mystery of that *lettre de cachet* was in fact never cleared up.

April 15th, 1764, now dawned, and the woman who, for nineteen years, had been the virtual ruler of France took her last "journey in bad weather," as her quondam royal lover coolly remarked, when the funeral *cortège* of the woman whom he once professed to adore left his palace in a storm of rain. Whether Madame de Pompadour herself had been De Brie's persecutor, or whether some enemy of the young count's had successfully sheltered himself under the protection of the favourite, was never known; but, after the Pompadour's decease, the count's friends apparently found no difficulty in pleading his cause at court, and De Brie, a few weeks after his escape, found himself appointed to a military post in the island of Martinique, which had been re-acquired by France in 1763. Here De Brie and his Marie lived contentedly, though the former bore his part in the struggle against the English in 1794, a struggle at last composed by the Peace of Amiens in 1802. As a noble and loyalist De Brie had little desire to return to France during the days of the Republic or of the "usurper Bonaparte," and when 1815



brought the restoration of the Bourbons, he and his wife were too settled in their colonial home to care to quit it. Marie's tale of "The hug of the bear" was the most popular of all the *contes* with which that lady—now a silver-haired grandame—loved to entertain the children and grandchildren who assembled round her chair on *fête* days and at the *jour de l'an*.

The old count, faithful to the traditions of his youth, was wont to sigh over the excesses of the Terror, and to denounce "the sins of France in 1793," and yet perhaps some secret sympathy was evoked in the old man's heart by the outspoken exclamation of a grandson who had been listening to Marie's oft-told tale:

"*Cher grandpère*, if the great Revolution wrought much evil, remember it at least destroyed the Bastille, and abolished for ever *lettres de cachet*."

## The Ivory Ju Ju.

A STORY OF THE NIGER SWAMPS.

By A WEST AFRICAN,

Author of "CROSSING THE FORD," etc.

CONTACT with European civilization for 400 years has after all but slightly changed the natives of the fever-haunted West African littoral. Among other things, they have learned to drink the poisonous Hamburg gin, which costs about 2½d. per quart wholesale, and that it is easier to ambush and shoot their enemy in the back with a flintlock gun as he traverses the narrow bush trails than it is to face him with the spear.

The head-men have also found it better to trade in gin and Manchester cloth, which crosses many hundred miles of swamp and forest on women's heads, and purchase their wives in the orthodox manner, rather than deal in slaves and raid the weaker villages, proceedings of which the Colonial Governments do not approve.

Here and there, a few tribes have settled down into peaceable and industrious lives under the influence of the missionaries, and dwell quietly in neat villages surrounding the palm-thatch church. These, however, are few and far between, and after all the West African is still very much the same as he was when Portuguese and British adventurers first entered the stagnant lagoons.

Inter-tribal warfare, wife stealing, murder and human sacrifice are prevalent enough to-day once the coast line is passed, and though the Governments of Great Britain and France do what they can to maintain order along a savage frontier—and the natives have learned that it is not good to defy these authorities—the power behind the throne is still the Ju Ju man, or Fetish priest.

Along three thousand miles of coast his influence is supreme, and every native chief, head-man, and trader, semi-Christians from the settlements, and even the sturdy Mahomedans of the north, acknowledge his authority. When the "Ju Ju man" is accused

of being an inciter to human sacrifice and various horrible rites, for which the participants therein are hanged every now and then by the British Government, and a practiser of black magic, the charge is a true one; but he is by no means "only an ignorant impostor." Set apart from childhood, and carefully trained in mysteries handed down through long generations, he knows various things not set down in the books of Western science, and there is no plant in the African forest of whose properties he is ignorant, which knowledge is occasionally dangerous to obnoxious chiefs.

From the Gambia to the Congo, among many millions of natives of different race and language, there is no one to dispute his sway, and a talisman, or "Ju Ju," prepared by a duly accredited "Feddah," is worth considerably more than its weight in gold. Neither are district commissioner and vice-consul above wearing one, though they scoff at its supposed virtue.

One Ju Ju was well known in the Haussa country, and supposed to possess the power of protecting its wearer from a violent death—a ring of ivory, ribbed with native gold, and hung about the neck by a plaited lacing of what may or may not have been human skin. It had come from the fringe of the northern desert, beyond the fever belt, and after being many times stolen, reached the hands of Sergeant Amadu, of the Niger Coast Protectorate Yoruba troops.

Amadu was of Haussa blood and six feet high, lighter in colour and with finer features than the coast tribes, and was as brave and soldierly as any of his race—which is no light praise. How he came into possession of the Ju Ju he never cared to say, but rumour had it that the talisman was given him by the youngest wife of a chief in the far-off Haussa country, who stole it from her sleeping lord, and afterwards suffered unspeakable things for the theft—for the dark places of Africa are still full of cruelty.

When Captain Jack Chisholm, in charge of one of the frontier stations of the Niger Coast Protectorate, first met Amadu, he was lying before Nana's stockade with a reed spear quivering in his side, while four of the river pirates scrambled through the plume grass to finish the wounded man with their keen matchets. The captain stood over him, hot revolver in hand, until the "Alecto's" blue-jackets came up through the smoke, trundling their "devil

gun" before them, and shouting like schoolboys, when Nana's men took themselves off in haste. Afterwards he transferred the Hausa to his own command, and the latter had served him with dog-like fidelity ever since, for the Moslem soldier rarely forgets a kindness.

One scorching December morning, Jack Chisholm, white-faced and weak from fever, leaned on the shoulder of the sergeant as he concluded his diplomatic visit to a native chief. The latter, surrounded by rows of half-naked warriors, armed with devilishly contrived corkscrew-headed spears, and "long dane" guns, sat in the shade of the royal umbrella, beneath the rustling palms which walled in his thatched village, while the white man, with four Yorubas at his back, waited the farewell greeting, "Go in peace."

For a few moments there was silence, and then the officer thought it well to recapitulate the object of his visit. "Tell him," he said to his interpreter, "that as the Government crushed Nana, so will they put down the Nimbi pirates. The arm of the white Queen is long, and if his people join the tribes who are arming to raid the dominion of the company, her hand will find him out."

The sable potentate, the head of one of the fierce tribes who dwell among the wilderness of forest and swamp which forms the upper portion of the Niger delta, conferred with the ever-present Ju Ju man at his elbow, and the interpreter translated:

"He say, sah, comp'ny man bad man too much, shoot his people, but he not fit fight white Queen. Say like you too much and you stop here for feast."

"Sorry I can't stay. Some of his friends might amuse themselves by burning the consulate if they find I'm away. Ask for his staff in case we meet too many of his gin-smuggling rascals lower down," was the white man's reply.

"Go in peace," said the chief, handing the captain an ebony staff curiously inlaid with ivory, the usual token of a messenger's authority, and an efficient passport if interfered with by any of that tribe, and ten minutes later the officer boarded his launch and started down river.

The yellow water, quivering beneath a dancing haze of heat, flashed back the fierce sunlight like a polished mirror, and in spite of the shade deck the heat on board the launch was intense. As every revolution of the propeller churned up the stagnant

water astern and the wash from the bows lapped among the mangrove stems on shore, sickening exhalations rose into the heated air, while from each bubbling bank of rotting mud ascended thin spirals of white steam, heavy with many kinds of sudden death. With the blinding light and glare dazzling his tired eyes, Captain Chisholm leaned over the iron tiller, his head swimming and a feeling of dizzy faintness upon him, with which white men in West Africa are only too well acquainted.

Dark cotton-wood forest, clustering groups of graceful palms, and dreary mangrove swamp with its festering mud below and leathery green foliage above, rose to view and faded astern as the launch hissed along down the steaming river, until at length the blue overhead changed to saffron, and amid splendours of crimson and purple the sun sank behind the forest. Then darkness closed down suddenly across river and swamp, though a flicker of starlight lay shimmering along the surface of the muddy water.

Captain Chisholm, as he lay panting by the tiller, with the grip of the fever fast closing round him, by no means liked the night's work that lay ahead. He had many enemies among the river tribes, especially among the leaders of Nana's late rebellion, and it was trying to the nerves to know that every here and there half a dozen naked savages might be lurking among the mangrove stems waiting for a pot shot at the launch, or watching beside a cast iron gun lashed to a paw-paw log, and loaded to the muzzle with broken pot, cast iron and old bottles. Such things had happened.

Besides, if the light metal launch struck a "snag," or submerged tree, the thin plates would rip like paper. "However," he said half aloud, "the news must reach Calabar in the 'Evangeline.' One risk more doesn't count in Africa. Full speed ahead, engineer."

The black engineer, who bitterly regretted leaving his snug berth in the Sierra Leone Mission launch to come to this wild land of fever and death, hesitated; but when the white man repeated sternly, "I said—more steam," he opened the valve wide and the launch sped fast through the darkness.

Two Yorubas crouched in the bows beneath the Maxim shield, and save for the panting of the high-pressure engine and the gurgling and frothing in the wake of the propeller, not a sound broke the stillness.

So the boat steamed along under the scintillating stars, until a sharp crescent moon swung slowly over the cotton-woods and poured down a faint, silvery light across the misty river.

The white man, with burning skin and blood like fire, gripped the tiller and peered ahead through the trembling shadows, and as he pushed it hard over to avoid an indistinct dark object ahead, a Yoruba in the bows shouted :

"Plenty too much cotton-wood there, sah."

The engineer pulled over the link, the propeller whirled up a shower of yellow foam as it started full speed astern, but a launch steaming ten knots cannot be stopped in a moment, and the little vessel forged ahead in spite of her engines. Next moment, a mass of interlacing branches appeared over the bows, and with a grinding crash she charged into a half-submerged tree, whose massive limbs rattled and snapped as they tore through the sun deck. Then came a dull blow and a horrid ripping, tearing sound, followed by the gurgle of water.

The black engineer leaped out of the tiny stokehold with the river water rising above his knees.

"Stand by your engine and start the pump, or I'll shoot you," said the captain, and he sullenly obeyed. It was too late; the launch lurched heavily over on her port side, and a lip of black water crawled up her deck, while the hoarse voice of Sergeant Amuda rose from the bows, shouting in the vernacular :

"If it be the will of Allah we shall yet escape. Swim for the bank, my brothers, and leave not the rifles."

Now a heavy Snider would sadly embarrass most white men under similar circumstances, but a West African is at least as much at home in the water as on dry land; so one by one the soldiers disappeared into the river, heading for the line of mangroves, while the captain calmly drew the buckles of his cartridge belt tighter.

Then the end came; one deck rose slowly higher and higher out of the river, while the water poured feet deep over the opposite coamings, until amid a rush of escaping steam the launch turned over and went down, and the white man felt the clammy water close above his head. Captain Chisholm could swim well, and his karki uniform was of no great weight, but he was weak from fever, and when he rose to the surface and struck



out feebly for the bank, he was glad to feel a firm grip on his shoulder, and hear the voice of Sergeant Amuda.

"Beach plenty near, sah ; land there one time."

The captain had a very uncomfortable feeling during that swim, for these rivers swarm with alligators, while huge snakes lurk among the shadows of every rotting swamp ; but at length he clutched a down-growing mangrove branch, and the sergeant with difficulty hoisted him on to a platform of interlacing roots, where he dropped, panting and breathless.

When at last grey dawn broke across the river and the bright tropic sunlight poured down upon the dismal swamp, the little party climbed from root to root over measureless depths of foul slime, in which repulsive scaly things, wallowed and crawled, and eventually reached a strip of firm earth beneath a group of palms.

As luck would have it, a big river canoe, manned by half a dozen spear-armed tribesmen, lay moored to the bank, which, as the chief's staff did not appear to be recognized, the sergeant and his men annexed, with fixed bayonets, in the name of the Niger Coast Protectorate, in spite of the owner's protests, the captain leaving a pencil-case as a token that whoever presented it at the consulate should receive so much gin and cloth.

An hour later, he lay tossing and burning beneath an awning of woven palm fibre, while the Yorubas bent over the leaf-shaped paddles and drove the light craft down river, aided, much against his will, by the engineer, who objected strongly to this means of propulsion and thought more regretfully than ever of the snug mission at Sierra Leone.

"No time to be lost now," said the white man. "Somehow these fellows hear things faster than any steamer can bring news to Government men, and every head-man on the river will be watching for us when he knows the launch has gone. It's the company they have the grudge against, but any white man or Yoruba is a fair mark."

Fortunately, a good brass cartridge is rarely damaged by a short immersion, and rifles and ammunition, carefully dried and cleaned, were still to be depended on. For two days and nights they held steadily on down river, and then at sunset reached a large island in the centre of a lake-like reach. The canoe was thrust ashore amid the mangroves, and while the Yorubas made a fire to roast a few yams, seized with the canoe, the white man,

buckling on his revolver, strode feebly into the bush, for his shaking limbs were cramped and stiff from lying in the canoe. Wading knee deep through crimson spike flowers and clusters of the white African lilies, he wandered down a misty avenue beneath a network of feathery palm branches, then wound in and out among huge cotton-wood trunks, from whose wide-spreading arms hung luxuriant festoons of many-hued trailing plants. The whole forest lay in dim green shadow, and the dense hothouse-like atmosphere was heavy with the scent of flowers and leaves, but at length a faint aromatic odour of burning wood, so characteristic of an African village, seemed to mingle with the spicy fragrance.

The captain stopped at once when he noticed it ; this betokened the presence of men—river tribesmen, the last thing in the world he desired ; so revolver in hand he crept slowly through the damp bushes. In spite of every precaution the snapping of twigs and rustling of leaves seemed to his overwrought nerves to echo through the forest ; but at length he stood beneath a grove of banana plants and cautiously peered through the screen of pale tinted leaves.

Before him lay an open space, fringed with orange and lime trees, perfuming the listless air with their heavy fragrance, then beneath a semicircle of feathery palms he saw a cluster of the mud-walled huts of the river tribes. Three or four huge, muscular fellows, naked except for a cotton sash, the only dress of most of the Niger men, and with hair knitted up into fantastic plaits, leaned against the "swish" walls, while a group of women were busy pounding cassava root and maize into the starchy, glutinous food, they call Kanki, or Kuse-kusi.

Captain Chisholm stood breathless, finger on revolver trigger, as he carefully noted the cheek slashes and the devices in blue tattoo, standing out in relief like chains of beads across black forehead and broad chest, then quietly and cautiously made his way back to the camp, which he reached just as darkness closed down.

When he heard the description of the villagers, the sergeant said : "I know him, sah ; know him bad ; be Nana's people. Shoot company man and smuggle gin ; chop too much white man."

The officer groaned ; he had stumbled into a nest of the worst

of the river pirates who had given the Royal Niger Company and the Government so much trouble, and were afterwards to cause more bloodshed at Akassa and Nimbi; but nothing could be done. The men were too worn out to dip a paddle and his own head was throbbing and dazed; therefore he determined to chance it and rest until dawn. A pile of the dryest wood to be had was placed near the fire, so screened by the dense forest as to be invisible at a few yards' distance, as the light might be useful for various reasons if attacked.

"Amadu," said the captain, "you and one Yoruba watch until moonrise; if you hear river man waken me one time. Are all the rifles loaded?" "Yes, sah," was the answer. "Good, palaver set," and the captain rolled himself in his waterproof blanket and sank wearily down between the buttress-like roots of a cotton-wood. Pressing his hot head against the cool bark he lazily watched the firelight flickering on the palm stems and the whirling wreaths of aromatic smoke drifting through the cotton-wood branches overhead, while his thoughts wandered far away from the heat and steam of Africa. Again in fancy he saw the snow lying white and cold on the broad Cheshire meadows, and the mullioned windows of a quaint, old-world mansion, gleaming rosy red across the darkness of the woodland drive, where he knew there were hearts that still followed his wanderings, and fingers that trembled each time they broke the seal of a letter bearing the stamp of the Niger Protectorate; then his eyes slowly closed and he slept.

Meantime, Sergeant Amuda leaned on his Snider and watched. Reared amidst a chaos of slave raiding and midnight foray, in a little known land to the far north, such of the Moslem Negroes as come south to enter the service of the "white Queen," form unexcelled irregular soldiers, who, if well led, will follow their white officers anywhere. The voices of the forest were as an open book to him, and there was no rustle of leaves or snapping of twigs but had its meaning for the sentinel. The thin crescent of the moon swung slowly into sight over the dark cotton-woods, and slender arrows of light filtered through the palm branches and lay in shimmering patches on the wet grasses, where myriads of fireflies flashed and sparkled. Amuda, however, had a feeling that all was not quite right, and he determined to watch a little longer himself. So, standing in the deep shadow of a palm, he

listened intently with rifle at the ready, never taking his eyes from the dark wall of foliage in front.

An alligator splashed and floundered in the river, then with a low swishing and springing back of bent grasses a huge snake dragged its shining scales and jewelled head towards the glow of the fire, while the night breeze sighed mournfully across the palms overhead.

Amuda shivered ; he knew the ways of every beast and bird, but this low moaning the heathen said was Amalaku, the water devil, breathing the fever-mist upon the trees, and he stepped aside to rouse a comrade, when his trained ear caught a rasping of branches and swaying of leaves that was made by neither bird nor beast.

Hastily rousing his comrades, he threw a fresh armful of wood upon the fire and gently shook the white man. "River man come sah ; live for bush now," he said softly. Then, after a low order in the vernacular, the men drew back a few yards into the blackness of the forest.

Listening with beating heart and strained nerves, Captain Chisholm heard the stealthy rustling grow louder and nearer, and knew that his foes were stealing up towards the fire to surprise the camp. The bushes crackled and rattled as he waited with finger on trigger, until at last a sheet of red flame blazed out from among the palms, followed by the crashing of flintlock guns, while a shower of potleg scattered the blazing brands and sang through the branches, chipping off handfuls of twigs and fluttering leaves. Then, amid a pandemonium of whistles and yells, the river men dashed through the smoke with swinging guns and glittering matchets, the red light shining on their naked skins and rolling eyes. For a moment they halted in astonishment. This was by no means what they expected ; instead of mutilated foes, torn by the murderous potleg, the camp was empty. So they stood and wondered, every man sharp and clear in the flickering glow, until the captain's voice rang out across the silence, "Fire !" and as the Sniders flashed there was a dull crunching sound of the heavy rifle balls smashing through bone and muscle. Then the order came : "Meet them with the bayonet !" and stepping out from behind a tree, Captain Chisholm swung the stumpy barrel of his heavy revolver to and fro across the crowd of dark figures, pressing

the trigger each time the foresight passed across the centre of a naked breast. Claspings the hot barrel he thrust in fresh cart-ridges, coolly and quietly, one by one, for in the hurry of the fight the fever seemed to have dropped from him, and he settled down in grim earnest to the work in hand. Glancing through the eddying wreaths of blue smoke, he saw the black engineer break away through the bush like a deer with a heavy spear shaft hanging from his shoulders. One Yoruba lay at his feet, gasping away his life, his chest horribly shattered with the jagged cast-iron charge; while from behind a cotton-wood root the sergeant's repeater, a gift from himself, flashed steadily shot after shot, and following each ringing report a man went down.

Two Yorubas were lunging and thrusting with the bayonet, holding the foe back from their dying comrade, and when the officer raised his revolver again he saw a huge negro stagger back—as with a horrid twist the red bayonet wrenched out from his side—and fall headlong across the fire, while a comrade dropped over him as the sergeant's Winchester again spat out a shower of red sparks. This was enough; without a cry the foe disappeared into the bush; and the captain leaned breathlessly against a tree, wondering if the whole thing was a dream until his eyes fell on the two limp figures amid the glowing embers, and other ghastly objects among the wet grass. "Thank heaven they've gone," he said, as he wiped his streaming forehead and felt his throat parched and dry and his eyes smarting with the acrid smoke of the "trade" gunpowder.

For a few moments there was silence, a deep, nerve-trying silence, only broken by a horrible crackling from the fire and a low moaning from the clustering bushes.

"Take up the wounded man and make for the canoe," said the officer, and carrying their dying comrade the little party thrust their way through the leaves towards the water.

Then there was a loud rustling in the forest between the camp and the river, and the white man ground his teeth. "The brutes are trying to cut us off. Each man for himself; fight your way to the canoe," he said. The two bearers dropped the unconscious figure they were struggling to drag along, and the tall sergeant stepped back and stooped down over him. "He is dead. It is Kismet; who shall escape his fate?" he said in the Negro tongue. Then there was a rush through the undergrowth, a swarm of

negroes burst through the bushes and swept out into the uncertain light of an avenue of palms, one half of which was fitfully illuminated by the moonbeams and the rest veiled in deepest shadow.

The captain felt a sharp sting in his left elbow, and saw a slender, reed hafted spear, quivering in his flesh. Snapping off the shaft, for it was useless to try to draw out the barbarously fashioned blade, he faced round, revolver in hand. "Go on, men," he shouted, as he fired into the mass as hard as finger could press trigger. For a moment the foe hesitated, and then came on, and as he attempted to reload, Sergeant Amadu went by, cramming cartridges into the cylinder of his Winchester. Halting by the side of the officer he fired twice into the mob, and then the white man saw something white glisten as the Hausa slipped a plaited string around his neck. "Be great Ju Ju, sah. Wear him and no one fit to kill you," he said, and before the officer could thank him or refuse to deprive him of his most cherished possession, the faithful fellow slipped away into the shadow.

Next moment there was a wild charge, a crowd of naked figures went by swinging flashing matchet and broad-headed spear, and the captain felt himself hurled to the ground with a muscular negro tearing at his throat.

He has only a hazy idea of what happened afterwards ; he remembers pressing his revolver muzzle against the warm flesh and after drawing the trigger staggering half dead towards the canoe, dodging instinctively bright matchet or whizzing spear. A ray of moonlight lit up the dusky glade, and he saw with quiet curiosity a ring of river men surrounding the tall sergeant, who with his karki jacket stained with blood was swinging a brass-bound Snider butt with terrible effect. The captain's brain was clouded with the fever ; he was faint from loss of blood, and he remembers leaning against a tree and firing his revolver three times into the struggling group, looking on meanwhile as if the result were no concern of his and he was merely an interested spectator. Then the circle broke up ; the sergeant burst through his foes, and the two hurried towards the canoe, a yelling mob at their heels.

At last he reached the mangroves, stumbled blindly through them, and stood up to his waist in water, clutching wildly at the canoe.



Next moment a matchet blade sparkled above his head, and he saw the sergeant's rifle-stock thrown up in a parry; then there was a clatter of steel on steel, and as the blue metal slid past the trigger guard the faithful Hausa dropped the weapon with a splash into the water and thrust himself in front of the officer. Captain Chisholm turned and drove his empty pistol butt full between the white teeth of a savage face, then staggered back and fell senselessly across the canoe.

When he came to, the sun was rising over the forest, and by the warm light he saw there were only two Yorubas paddling. "Where's Amadu and the rest?" he asked faintly.

"Amadu bring you to canoe, then river men chop him, and he go for die in water; Shaillu and palaver man die too. River man not fit kill white man when he wear great Ju Ju," was the answer.

The officer groaned and feebly lifted his head to look over the side. They were far away down the river, and the islanders had either had quite enough of the fight, or had no canoes to follow the chase, and with a shudder he collapsed again into the bottom of the canoe.

All day long the frail craft drifted slowly down the sluggish stream under the fierce sunlight, wounded Yorubas, too faint to hold the paddle, lying half senseless in the bows, while a haggard white man with a spear cankering in his shoulder screamed and raved in the malaria delirium under the awning amidships—a ghastly crew.

At sunset, however, the boom of a steam whistle rang out across the misty river, and a smart launch, with the white ensign streaming over her stern, came hissing and splashing up the muddy current and shot alongside.

"A bad case. Get them aboard; we must make Ilepas as soon as possible," said the major, to whose station the launch belonged; but as they lifted the emaciated, fever-worn frame, over the side and placed it under the shade of the sun deck, the white man only raved incoherently that he would go back and find his sergeant though all the river devils of Africa stood in the way, until the major poured a few drops of laudanum down his blackened throat and he sank into a restless sleep.

Not long afterwards Her Majesty's gunboats "Thrush" and "Widgeon," with the armed steamers of the Chartered Company, moved slowly through the tangled waterways, their yard-arms

brushing the trees as they churned their way up the yellow stream, and after a sharp struggle broke the power of the river men, and for a time there was peace in the land.

Captain Chisholm eventually recovered, and is now far from the dark land of heat and fever. The curious ring of ivory still hangs on his watch-chain, and at times, as his eye rests on the quaint device in gold, the symbol of the Ju Ju mysteries, his thoughts go back to the dim, misty river, and with a moisture in his eyes he sees again the tall figure of the Mahomedan soldier parrying the matchet slash which would have cleft his skull. Then he touches the talisman reverently, for he knows it is the price of a brave man's blood.

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## **"Appearances are against him."**

By HELEN F. HETHERINGTON,

Part Author of "PAUL NUGENT, MATERIALIST," etc., etc.

### **CHAPTER I.**

DOROTHY WITHERINGTON was tired to death of her own company as she sat in the large refreshment-room of the station at Cologne, consuming a modest repast of coffee, roll, and poached egg. It seemed months ago since she left Munich last Monday evening in a positive whirlwind of regret, for she was very sorry to leave, and her friends were equally loth to part with her. A thoroughly English, pretty, piquant face, framed in rich brown hair, a trim, neat little figure, generally clad in the neatest and trimmest of tailor-made frocks, she had succeeded very well with the foreign element; and all the younger members of the various Legations had been at her feet. By the advice of a German countess, who had married an extravagant Englishman, and therefore had to practise economy, she had taken a Cook's ticket which was second-class for the first half and first for the second; but second-class Germans proved to be very different to the princes, counts, and barons whom she had met when staying at the British Legation, and she was truly thankful to get out of the train, although it was only 3.30 a.m. when she arrived at Heidelberg. She had been told by every one that to see Heidelberg in the first freshness of a summer's morning was a joy for ever, so she had come, after a short rest at the station, and now she was trying to feel the poetry of life creeping into her sleepy brain—trying, oh so hard, to remember all about the pathos and the tragedy of the past; but it was difficult to "enthuse" all alone, and all the glory of battlement and tower, of wooded heights and terraced slopes, faded into nothingness as she sank into an overpowering sleep. Many early birds in the shape of long-bearded and be-spectacled professors, came and inspected Dorothy as she slept as quietly on that historic terrace as if she were in her own home in Surrey. The rest of the journey was like a bad dream. A noisy crew on the steamer, who shouted the "Wacht am Rhein" as if they meant to wake

the "Seven Sleepers," and threw their glasses into the river with an enthusiasm that was suddenly chilled by the advent of a waiter with a bill. The sun set in a crimson glow behind the heights of Ehrenbreitstein, and the moon, rising in silvered contrast, cast one bright trail across the waves as its harbinger.

But all the beauty of the scenery, which was fresh to her though hackneyed to so many, was spoilt to Dorothy, whose practical mind was fixed upon her train. It seemed as if some spirit of ill-luck pursued her, for when she reached Coblenz the last train was gone, so she had to betake herself to an hotel; and she lost the mid-day train at Cologne the next day, through the officiousness of a stranger. Taking it for granted that she meant to go by Flushing and Queenborough, he told her that it did not start till 1.30. So she was quietly eating her luncheon, when the porter came back still laden with her small luggage, to tell her that she was too late.

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Absolutely not another till half past ten at night! Her heart sank down into her boots. She had done the cathedral exhaustively on her way through, so she could not stay there for ever, neither could she buy continual bottles of Eau de Cologne, and the smells were enough to drive any one out of the town; so she took the advice of a friendly official at the station, and went off in search of some public gardens which he strongly recommended. The gardens might have been public on any other occasion, but they were intensely private on this afternoon, for there was not a soul in them. The Restauration was empty; the band-stand a wilderness that did not even howl; without the accustomed crowd and the enlivening music nothing could be more depressing, and Dolly felt inclined to cry. After all these misadventures, she gave a sigh of immense relief when she found herself at last comfortably established in a first-class carriage of the 10.30 p.m., with some reasonable hope of reaching her home at Leatherley late in the afternoon of the following day. She was longing to use her tongue, and to exchange ideas with any one else; but true to the injunctions of her friends, and untrue to herself, she told the guard that she wished to be alone. At the last moment, the door was thrown open by a smart official, who threw in some rugs, and then stepped back with a profound bow to admit their owner.

Dorothy explained mendaciously that she wished to be alone.

"Yes, I hope no one will disturb us," the stranger answered in a pleasant voice.

Of course it was open to her to explain that he was the intruder whom she wished to eject, but this was too much for her kind of human nature; and besides, she was so heartily glad to have a companion after all those long hours of solitude, and a gentlemanly Englishman seemed a prize after those "impossible" Germans. She was just in a mood when any man of average agreeableness might have made a deep impression, and Jack Beauchamp was far beyond the average man in his powers of charm. The girl in her present state of mind had no chance against him. She probably would have succumbed under any circumstances, for Beauchamp always gained a boundless popularity with women, and that without an effort. It was his smile that did it. His features were good, his face lined and careworn, as if he had taken his part in the battle of life and been wounded, but all the care and the trouble went out of it when he smiled. His smile was his passport through life, and every woman was ready to *viser* it.

Moreover, he had just come from Munich, which gave him a heightened charm. He had seen the pictures in the Pinacothek—played tennis on the ground she knew so well—and had actually met some of the friends whom she had found so charming. Dolly effervesced with delight, and threw herself into the conversation with all the greater eagerness because of the long weary hours in which she had been forced to be silent. When they were breakfasting together at Brussels, she felt as if they were friends for life. He was very kind and attentive to her, but only by fits and starts; for every now and then he seemed to forget her existence as completely as the hat which he left behind in the refreshment-room, and would have lost, if Dorothy had not picked it up surreptitiously. When she presented it to him, he laughed, and said it was the third possession he had left behind in the course of his journey.

"My brother always tells me that if I had a wife I should leave her behind one day at a station, and forget that I was married."

"I know if, I were the wife, I should not let you forget me," she exclaimed thoughtlessly; and then a vivid blush crimsoned

her cheeks, for the speech sounded queer in her own ears after it had left her eager tongue.

"There would not be the slightest danger," he said quietly, as a shade of amusement crept into his eyes, which he kept fixed on her red face. Nice little face with plenty of character in the straight line of the dark eyebrows and the curve of the rounded chin. It would be a pity to let it go out of his life—to let this meeting and the unconventional acquaintance slip away from him like so many other pleasant memories. And yet he knew it would, unless he made an unusual effort to keep it there. If he had one of those little absurdities dangling on her *châtelaine*—that would be a great help. But if he asked her for her silver pencil-case that would sound absurdly sentimental, and if he explained that he was afraid of forgetting her, that might sound distinctly rude.

"The boys won't be able to meet me at the station," she said abruptly. "They will all be playing in a match."

"Are 'the boys' your brothers, Miss Witherington?"

"Yes, three of them. Isn't it luck to have so many?" her blue eyes shining with the wholesome warmth of family affection.

"Depends upon the brothers. If I had three, I should cut my throat."

"I shouldn't mind a dozen like mine."

"Three like mine would mean Bedlam," shrugging his shoulders.

"Isn't he nice?" with ready sympathy.

"If he were not, it would be a great relief."

"I don't understand."

"You would if you knew him."

"If he is nice, why don't you care for him?" looking into his face once more with puzzled eyes.

"But I do, more than for anything else on earth."

A dreamy look came into his eyes, and for some time he was lost in thought.

More than for anything else on earth!

"A large order," thought Dorothy as she pretended to be engrossed in her book. She began to contrast him with all the other men she was thrown into contact with in her home life, and an absolute gulf seemed to divide them. She compared



their talk about golf, cricket, tennis, hunting or shooting, to his widely different conversation about the lights and shadows of life, as he had seen them in the various countries he had sauntered through. All that he said was so interesting, so full of flavour; and woman-like she failed to see that much of the pleasure of their intercourse consisted in his also being such a good listener.

He had the art of drawing her out so that she showed the best side of her nature to him; and he listened with such an appearance of interest, that she told him many private details of herself and her home, which she was afterwards scared to remember that she had confided to a comparative stranger. As they sped on their way to Victoria, she thought with regret that all the many foreign receptions, the pleasant afternoons in artists' studios, the constantly recurring processions in the Bavarian capital, would soon be like a dream; but still there would be something left, if her present charming companion did not pass out of her life with all the rest. There was nothing of the "new woman" in Dorothy Witherington, and in her out-of-date shyness she actually did not know how not to let him go. He was considering her—quietly pleased with her spontaneity, charmed with her utter absence of aggressiveness, so unlike the majority of the girls he had come across. He could not fancy her whirling down Rotten Row on her darling "bike," or ensconced in the corner of a smoking-carriage with a cigarette between her pretty lips. She looked up as they were "slowing" into Victoria with all her unexpressed wishes in her eyes; but his were fixed on her *châtelaine*, although his next remark had nothing to do with it, for he only said, "If you will give me the ticket for your luggage, I will get it put on a cab for you."

She pulled out the precious paper, which she had been dreadfully afraid of losing, and placed it in his hand, as she told him that she would not want a cab, as her train to Leatherley would start from the other side of the station.

"Then go and get your ticket, and I will bring your luggage and see you off. I am quite sorry that our journey is over," he added with a caress in his voice, as he stepped out of the carriage and held out his hand.

"But it is not good-bye yet," she said, as briskly as she could, for she felt absurdly depressed.

"No, I shall come and see you off," he rejoined, with his most winning smile.

And so they parted to meet again—when, where, and how?

## CHAPTER II.

DOROTHY took her ticket for Leatherley, and placed herself in a conspicuous position under the clock on the L.B.S.C. side of the station, with all her smaller belongings grouped round her. But no Mr. Beauchamp came in sight. Many people eyed the trim figure in the neat tailor-made suit of grey tweed with admiration; but she was far too much engrossed in watching every pile of luggage that came from the London, Chatham and Dover side to be aware of either bold stares or covert glances. The 5.25 steamed out of the station—the third train she had missed on her way from Munich—so she was quite accustomed to that sort of thing. But where was Mr. Beauchamp?

She sent a porter after her luggage, and then another, but as they both came back with the same unsatisfactory report, she left one in charge of her travelling bag, and started off herself, convinced that she would find Mr. Beauchamp sitting on her missing trunks, absently waiting for her to turn up. But when she reached the platform where she had left him there was no sign of him to be seen. She appealed to the official standing at the door of the customs-house office, and his answer perplexed her still further. Luggage directed to Miss Witherington had been delivered to a gentleman on the presentation of her ticket; but as to what became of it after it had left his hands, he could not say. With a twinkle in his eye, he inquired if the gentleman happened to be a friend, or only an acquaintance picked up on the journey.

"He was a friend," she began in a hurry, but truth compelled her to add, as an indignant flush mounted to her cheeks, "I met him first at Cologne. But he was a *thorough* gentleman, and I would trust him with anything."

"Well-dressed, I suppose, with everything up to high-water mark about him?"—a decided twitch about the corners of his mouth.

"He was very well dressed, but what has that got to do with it? If I could only see him it would be all right."

"You will never see him again ma'am, depend upon it. He's

one of the swell-mob, not a doubt of it, and you had better lay an information against him at Scotland Yard. 'If I was you, I'd go there at once.'

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she exclaimed indignantly, her feelings outraged to the last degree; "you've made an outrageous mistake. He is sure to be looking for me in some other part of the station."

"Very well, ma'am," and the man made an heroic struggle after gravity as he tried not to smile at what he considered the most lunatic case of misplaced confidence; "you give me all the particulars in writing, and then we'll try and trace the cab."

"There was no cab."

"There must have been a cab," in an exasperated tone; "the luggage couldn't have walked."

"No, but a porter was to have brought it after me."

"Ah! yes, I quite understand. No cab, of course, till your back was turned, and then he was off like a shot."

Poor Dolly fumed all the way down to Leatherley, but her common sense told her that she ought not to blame anybody for taking an uncharitable view of Mr. Beauchamp's conduct. To the outside world, the circumstances must seem suspicious, whilst to one who had known and spent hours in his company, the idea was simply ludicrous. Perplexed, she sat in the corner of a railway carriage at last, on the way home. To be without her luggage was annoying in the extreme, for it contained nearly all her worldly possessions, and she would want all her pretty crêpons and muslin frocks for the summer parties at Leatherley, especially as she would arrive just in time for the cricket week.

Three tall figures clad in cricketing flannels were waiting on the platform at Leatherley; and as she hugged them one by one, all the troubles and annoyances of the journey were forgotten in the pleasure of seeing "the boys" again.

"So you've turned up again," Tom, the eldest, exclaimed as he released himself from her embrace. "We want to know what you've been up to, old girl?"

"Yes, you've been a precious long time about it," Dick said, with a nod of his curly head.

"And where's the rest of your togs?" cried Ned, the youngest, as he picked up her bag and the bundle of rugs; "you can't have been travelling for months with only these." Then came

the humiliating confession that she had lost her luggage at Victoria ; but, as she added hopefully that it would probably come down by the next train, she was hurried into the dog-cart without any further questions. Fortunately they were full of the match. Tom had beaten the record (the Leatherley record *notâ bene*) and won the game for his side by his splendid batting. The boys were bubbling over with excitement, and nothing else seemed of any importance whatever.

But Dorothy was not to escape so easily when Mr. Witherington brought his acute mind to bear on the case. As a barrister who was working his way to a prominent position at the bar, he considered it derogatory to his dignity to have a daughter who was taken in by the first sharper she came across. He placed the eye-glass which had been the terror of all his children in their juvenile days in his right eye, and then settled down to business. Dolly was asked every question that was obviously necessary, and a few that seemed irrelevant to Mrs. Witherington, who intervened every now and then with exasperating remarks.

"You mean to say that you handed the ticket which was your only security for your property to a stranger, of whose antecedents you knew nothing, and whose name was probably borrowed for the occasion?"

"You forget that he had been very polite to her, and that Dolly was naturally grateful to him," interposed his wife, as she looked compassionately at her daughter's flushed face.

"My dear, do not interfere, and let Dolly answer for herself," the barrister said in his most professional manner. "You actually left it with him, and then played into his hands by turning your back on him, and going off to quite a different part of the station?"

The poor girl admitted everything.

"Then, my dear child, you are the most consummate idiot I ever came across. You quite deserve never to see those trunks again ; but, nevertheless, I mean to get them back for you, lodge this fine friend of yours in the dock, and enjoy a quarter of an hour with him."

"You don't know him!" she cried in much agitation. "He is quite as much a gentleman as any of you, and it seems blasphemy to talk of him like that!"

"Dolly, my dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Witherington, who thought it necessary to look shocked.

"Might I ask who introduced this charming swindler to you?" inquired Tom, with a lofty air.

"As if you waited for that in a railway carriage, and when you had been obliged to hold your tongue for hours?" turning upon him like an angry little terrier ready to fight.

"It *must* have gone hard with you when you couldn't talk," he answered, with a mischievous shake of his head.

"I shall inquire at Victoria, and then if it is as I take it for granted, go straight on to Scotland Yard. Large basket-trunk with initials outside"—her father went on, as he took out his gold pencil, "and a smaller portmanteau; label on each, with your name and address down here?"

"Not that; only 'Miss Witherington, Victoria, London—via Ostend and Dover.'"

"Then the fellow, even if he were honest, would not have an idea where to send it?" This question was accompanied by a look which said as plainly as possible, "How *could* you be such a fool?" Dolly felt it acutely, and said with unusual meekness, "You see, I never meant to be parted from it."

"This comes of letting a girl travel by herself," remarked Ned, who as the youngest of the party naturally had the greatest confidence in his own opinion. "I always thought it a huge mistake."

"Never mind, Doll," exclaimed Dick, who had an idea that his poor little sister had been badgered enough. "I daresay the Unknown will turn up trumps after all, and run down to-morrow, with a handsome apology."

"He doesn't know where she lives," said Mr. Witherington, drily.

"Yes, he does," put in Dolly quietly.

"Then, why the d——I didn't you say so before?"

Dolly, fretted and flustered, amazed the whole family by bursting into tears. Tears were an extra which she never threw in amongst her home habits, and every member of the family felt distinctly remorseful at the sight of them. Mr. Witherington slipped his memoranda into his pocket, and took up the *Globe*, as a sign that he meant to drop the subject; and Mrs. Witherington exclaimed, with motherly tact, "Come, boys, get out the cards. You ought to teach Dolly that game Mr. Pottinger showed you." The suggestion came as a welcome relief,

and Mr. Beauchamp's name was dropped like a scalding potato. But the potato could have been left where it fell, whereas the former could neither be forgotten nor ignored. Every inquiry was made, but if those two trunks had been driven straight into the Thames, they could not have disappeared more completely, and Mr. Beauchamp might have gone with them.

All the presents that Dolly had collected with such care at Munich had gone with the rest, and the boys had to do without them; but Mr. Witherington was unwontedly liberal in replacing her lost fineries, so that she was able to make a creditable appearance at the Leatherley gaieties. She delighted her friends by her descriptions of doings in Munich, but as to the events of her journey, she preserved a dead silence.

### CHAPTER III.

A YEAR passed, during which Dorothy Witherington, the most popular girl in Leatherley, received two offers and declined them both.

"It's just as if her heart had been lost in one of those confounded boxes," Tom remarked with a grunt, as he grieved over the disappointment of his best friend.

"Or to the scoundrel who walked off with them," suggested Ned.

"Don't be an idiot. She hadn't known him for more than four-and-twenty hours."

"You saw her at Lord's, always with her head over her shoulder?" with a knowing grin.

"She was sweet on Graham, that Trinity fellow who had the impudence to ask her to sport 'light blue,'"—with an air of superior knowledge.

"Didn't care a brass farthing for him. Got me to walk on one side of her when he stuck like a postage-stamp to the other."

"All the same, it's a beastly nuisance. Graham's an owl, but Maynard's a good sort all round and as nice as they make them."

"Let Doll alone, can't you?" remonstrated Dick, who was mending his bicycle. "You are in a precious hurry to lose her."

"I shouldn't lose her if she married Maynard. She would always be handy for golf, or a spin on a bike."



"Don't you flatter yourself. Maynard would be all over the shop, and you would have to take a back-seat for ever afterwards."

Dick having said his say walked away with his bicycle in tow, anxious to work off some of his superfluous energy, and the others left matrimonial projects to take care of themselves.

Dolly always seemed to belong more to the boys than to her mother or father. Mrs. Witherington was fond of pottering about cottages, inspecting babies' new teeth, finding places for unfledged girls, questioning every one she came across on the catechism, and lending the ear of sympathy to wives with uncivilized husbands. She also delighted in paying calls, going out in the carriage, with best bonnet and card-case, at a fixed hour summer and winter. This was her idea of life, and it filled her placid soul with calm content. Mr. Witherington, on the other hand, was fettered by his habit of going up to town directly after breakfast, only returning just before dinner. It was impossible to be an attentive father under such circumstances, especially as he always remembered that he was tired when he was at home, although he forgot it when out in society. Thus the boys had to look after their sister as well as themselves. Sometimes the responsibility weighed quite heavily on their volatile minds; but not often, for they were a happy-go-lucky lot, with little thought for the future, although they were at a time of life when it is apt to be shaped by the present.

Leatherley, in its leafy hollow, was in a flutter on the 19th of June. The first stone of an orphanage for the sons of "failures" was to be laid that afternoon by the popular M.P., Sir Samuel Forest. In order to make the occasion still more attractive the Hungarian band was engaged, and a flower-show projected. Then Lady Forest made up her mind to give an afternoon-party in honour of the Bishop, who was to say a few prayers at the ceremony. Immediately, Lady Wigan, the rival "Lady Bountiful" of the place, took philanthropy under her wing in the shape of the founder—asked him to stay at the Hall with any amount of his friends—and issued invitations for a ball. Fired by this noble example, several of the inhabitants, who could neither give balls nor afternoon receptions, determined to do something and formed themselves into a committee.

This is the age for committees, and we have them on all sides of us without feeling much the better or the worse for them.

But the effect of the Leatherley committee was soon apparent, for the village broke out into such an irruption of bunting as had never been seen since the Jubilee; and every man belonging to it felt that he had made his mark in it for ever, as he saw flags to right and left fluttering in the sunshine, and knew that this was the outcome of all those tedious cogitations in a stuffy room.

Curiously enough, the one who ought to have been the most conspicuous individual on this occasion was the least prominent. It was said that he loathed a fuss, and would only consent to appear at the two receptions on condition that he should not be pointed out to any one as the "founder," and should be treated as a casual looker-on. The ladies were bitterly disappointed but they had to give in, and Lady Wigan said in her sprightly way:

"It is disgusting to hold a trump card in your hand, and not be allowed to play it."

Dolly, fair and fresh as the morning, looked like a walking forget-me-not in her blue flowered muslin. She was the happy possessor of a pink ticket which admitted to the inner circle.

The boys were stewards, so they had their fair share of the broiling sun, bad for the temper as well as the complexion. They had cautioned Dolly to be sure and "hurry up," but at the last moment Mrs. Witherington was missing, having gone off on a spasmodic errand to her district, where she found every cottage empty. Consequently both mother and daughter were exasperatingly late, and Tom, who had been looking out for them till his patience was exhausted, greeted them with a volley of reproaches.

"This is the best I can do for you," he said grumpily, "but it's your own fault, you know."

"It will do very nicely," panted Mrs. Witherington, who was too overcome with heat and hurry to realize where she was.

"I couldn't see worse if I had stayed at home," pouted Dolly, who thought it was no good to have a brother for a steward if he could not give her a prime position.

"This way, Miss Witherington." She followed obediently, for the voice was Charlie Maynard's, and she knew that an admirer would break any amount of rules in a way that she could not expect from a brother.

Her intuitions proved correct, for she found herself in front of all the common herd, in a position where she could see everything, and as soon as she got there the proceedings began. She looked round with eager curiosity—Lady Forest's aigrette would nearly sweep the skies; the Bishop looked like an apostle in modern garments; a pity that Lady Wigan had chosen green for her new dress, and there was Bessie looking like a flame, with her red hair and yellow frock. The next moment she came to a full stop, in the midst of her common-place reflections, for, half hidden by the portly form of Sir Samuel Forest, stood Mr. Beauchamp! She gave a gasp, and held on to the rope in front of her, as if to steady herself, whilst the blood rushed up into her face one moment, and then retreated fast, leaving her cheeks as white as the plumes of her hat. Her heart swelled with pride, as she looked at him, for he had such an unmistakable air of good breeding. Now, when her brothers saw that aristocratic head and figure—let them call him "swindler, sharper" if they dared. Her eyes flashed as she remembered every opprobrious epithet which had been hurled at him. They would never have doubted him if they had seen him. How proud she was to think that she had never done so, even now, when the trunks were still missing and nothing had been cleared up. Her faith was scarcely a logical one, but then logic and faith are not supposed to be inseparable allies. Oh! if he would only give one glance in her direction. But if he did not recognize her, that would be worse than anything. Lady Wigan was whispering in his ear, evidently suggesting that he should come forward into a more prominent place, but he only hid himself more completely behind the baronet. It requires a real gentleman to take a back-seat voluntarily the girl reflected in a gush of enthusiasm.

Then there was a general move, and she found herself carried along in a stream towards the flower-show, which was held on the same piece of ground. She was entirely detached from the rest of her family, but in the midst of friends, who threw nods and smiles at her, interspersed with ejaculatory remarks, to which she replied in the vaguest manner, for she could think of nothing and nobody but Mr. Beauchamp. At last she caught sight of him, standing in the midst of a knot of people, who were considered the swells of the neighbourhood. She was pushed on towards him whether she would or no, but when landed just in

front of him, a feeling of intense shyness came over her, and she absolutely dared not raise her eyes. One minute more and she would be carried past him, and he would never recognize her back hair; and oh! how the boys would give it her!

"Miss Witherington alone, without any of her numberless squires," exclaimed Lady Wigan in her high-pitched voice, "such a thing has never been seen before."

"Miss Witherington?" repeated Mr. Beauchamp, as a wave of memory swept over his brain, "surely we have met before?"

Her hand was in his, his grave eyes were looking into hers, and then the most incriminating of blushes flooded her face, covering her with shame, and depriving her of the power of speech when she had so much to say.

"You haven't forgotten me?" he asked, or rather asserted, with his unforgettable smile. "We were quite friends when we parted, or at least I thought so."

"Of course we were," she cried breathlessly. "But—but—" stammering painfully, as she thought of the boys, the missing trunks, and everything—"you—you never——"

Just at that most critical moment, a footman forced his way through the crowd with an orange envelope in his hand, which he presented to Mr. Beauchamp.

"One moment," he said, apologetically, before Dolly could finish her sentence. He tore it open with the manner of a man who fears bad news. A look of pain and bitter annoyance crossed his face, as he crumpled it in his hand.

"When is the next train?" he asked of his hostess.

"In five minutes," she replied quickly. "Take my carriage—you will just do it."

"A thousand thanks," and he was off, when Lady Wigan screamed after him:

"The ball—don't forget to come back for it."

He nodded, and vanished.

"What's up, Doll? You look as if you had seen a ghost!" inquired Tom, as he found her staring into space with a blank face.

"I've seen Mr. Beauchamp," she said slowly, as if she were half in a dream.

"Beauchamp, the swindler!" he exclaimed in the greatest excitement. "You've never let him slip?"

"He had a telegram, but he's coming back."

"A telegram of course, when he saw you. The oldest dodge out!" fiercely. "I'll send the police after him; he shan't escape a second time."

Dolly clutched his sleeve and held it tight. "He's a friend of Lady Wigan's," she whispered in an agony.

"Then I'll have the pleasure of unmasking him," sternly.

"Ah! you cunning little thing! So you knew him all the while." Lady Wigan turned round with an amused smile, not having heard a word that had passed between the brother and sister. "Isn't he too utterly charming?"

"Do you know much about him?" Tom asked brusquely.

"More than most people," and she nodded mysteriously. "To-day, for instance, he *would* keep dark, and he would not let me breathe a word about him."

"Just what I should have expected," he said gruffly.

"Yes, he's perfectly incorrigible," with a serene smile.

"I don't suppose there's the smallest chance of his turning up to-night?" he hazarded.

Lady Wigan gave a little scream of horror.

"Not turn up? Of course he will. Why, the ball is given for him. I should look an utter fool if he failed me." Then the Bishop came up to her with a flattering remark on her orchids, and Tom turned on his sister wrathfully.

"You've made my arm quite black and blue."

"You kept me in such a fever," she said with a sigh of relief, and without a particle of penitence.

"Now, look here, Doll," he said with the air of a commander-in-chief. "I can stand no further nonsense. Either this man is a thief, or he is not. I ought to wire to Scotland Yard at once."

"And a fine thing it would be to tell Lady Wigan to-night when she was expecting him at her ball, that you had got him run in like a common pickpocket. You *must* wait—wait till to-night."

He looked down into her pretty, urgent face, and something in its very urgency reminded him of Ned's idiotic suggestion. He put it away from him with a frown, but it worried him.

"Tom, dear," she said softly, "do be a good boy and wait."

"But he won't turn up. Stands to reason he won't turn up."

"But he will. Nothing on earth could make me doubt him," enthusiastically.

"You know nothing about him at all," coming down on her like a sledge-hammer, as if he would dash the ridiculous idea out of her head.

"He *couldn't* stay away when Lady Wigan says she is going to give this ball in his honour."

"The honour of a fellow who steals boxes!" he said grimly.

"Don't you see how impossible it is?" she went on coaxingly.

"Now, if he had ruined thousands in a bank, or been the director of a fraudulent company, it might have been different. They *do* mix in the best society," she added rather incoherently.

"And, after all, they are your boxes and not mine, and if you choose to present them to him, it's your look-out and not mine," he admitted unexpectedly.

"I never could see why you all should make such a fuss," as she saw her advantage and swiftly made use of it.

"Oh, come now, we are bound to stand up for you. But let there be no mistake. If you see him to-night, give it him straight. 'Here *you* are, but where are my boxes?'"

"All right, dear old Tom," squeezing his arm surreptitiously.

"That's all very well, but what will the governor say?"

"I'd rather not imagine," and Dolly laughed.

"I say, Witherington, your sister did not come here to talk to you," objected Captain Wigan, brother-in-law to Lady Wigan, who remembered Dolly as the girl who "took the cake" at the Dorking ball.

Tom laughed, and took himself off to buy a button-hole at the Miss Forests' stall, whilst Dolly gathered together her scattered wits in order to make herself agreeable. It would be hours before she would see Mr. Beauchamp again, and meanwhile she did not wish to be dubbed the dullest girl in Leatherley, for, once dubbed, Heaven help her!

Sir Horace Wigan was an ex-lord-mayor, who, late in life, married the daughter of an impecunious Viscount. It was a bold venture, but courage deserves success, and it succeeded. Lady Wigan spent his money royally, but she spent it on him as well as on herself, and took care not to land him in the workhouse, possibly, because she knew she would have to follow him there if she did.

Stoneleigh Hall looked like a venerable old man posing as a youth, for it was decorated, on this occasion, in the newest and



most frivolous of styles, which scarcely agreed with its massive beauty. Dolly felt as if she had got into the wrong house, as she looked round with bewildered eyes at marble pillars decked with wreaths of roses, and connected with Liberty scarves of floating silks and varied hues.

"Oh, my dear, I'm in such a state of mind," Lady Wigan confided to her in a tragic whisper. "He hasn't come, and it's going to be Hamlet without the play. I mean just the other thing," laughing.

"Oh, he must come. He *couldn't* stay away," Dolly assured her with strange earnestness, but the hostess was far too busy to remark it.

Mrs. Ward, the rector's wife, came up with a confident air.

"Now, Lady Wigan, you really must point him out to me. There are so many strangers here that we can't identify him."

"Quite impossible," with a mischievous shake of her head. "I'm under a promise and vow not to betray him. Look over there," pointing with her red feather fan towards the doors of the conservatory, round which several men were standing, "and find him if you can."

Mrs. Ward, who was tiny, perched on tiptoe to look over the white shoulders of a girl in front.

"I see him," she exclaimed excitedly. "That tall man with a grey beard and eyeglass. Philanthropy is written across his broad forehead."

"That accounts for its absence from other parts of him," remarked Sir Horace drily.

Mrs. Ward stared.

"You talk like that of a man who has founded a splendid orphanage! Whoever thought of 'failures' before?"

"Every father that has made a fortune or a name. Their sons are always failures; and then they talk of heredity and all that rot," with contempt in his tones and in his puffy eyes.

"By an inverse ratio, sons of failures ought to be great successes," put in Sir Samuel, with a twinkle in his eye. "These interesting orphans will therefore turn out the matrimonial catches of the county, and the spinsters of Surrey will have the best chance."

"Introduce me at once," she insisted, full of gratitude to the man who had provided possible husbands for her five little daughters.

"But the orphans haven't come yet," looking bewildered.

"But the founder has. He is standing over there," she persisted.

Sir Samuel continued to stare till Lady Wigan stooped forward and whispered something in his ear, when he checked a loud guffaw, and proceeded in search of his old friend, General Winslow, chuckling as he went. At the same time, Lady Wigan, almost consoled for the absence of the real philanthropist by passing off the false one, bent down to whisper to Mrs. Ward: "I wouldn't breathe a word to him about the orphanage. He can't bear it."

Meanwhile poor Dolly waited and watched; not that she sat in a corner and sighed, for her partners were many and various. Whenever she met Tom's eyes, whether in middle of waltz or lancers, or even a flirtation in a corner, they said as plainly as eyes could speak, "I told you so." She always drew up her neck with an air of the greatest confidence, but as the moments fled so fatally fast they took some of her certainty with them. The unrest of her mind gave a brilliant colour to her cheeks, a feverish brightness to her eyes; and all her intimate friends, who were accustomed to think of her as "rather pretty," were amazed to find that she had blossomed into absolute beauty. This conviction was especially forced on them by the behaviour of Captain Wigan, who was supposed to be one of the smartest men about town. He positively would not dance with any one else, and when not dancing with her, was always staring after her as he lounged against the wall. No other girl would have looked over his shoulder at the door when he was dancing with her, or lost the point of his wittiest sayings because her attention was straying; and this was her charm for him.

Tom pulled out his watch: "Last train just come in. He must be here in ten minutes, or not at all."

"He is sure to come," Dolly said rather breathlessly.

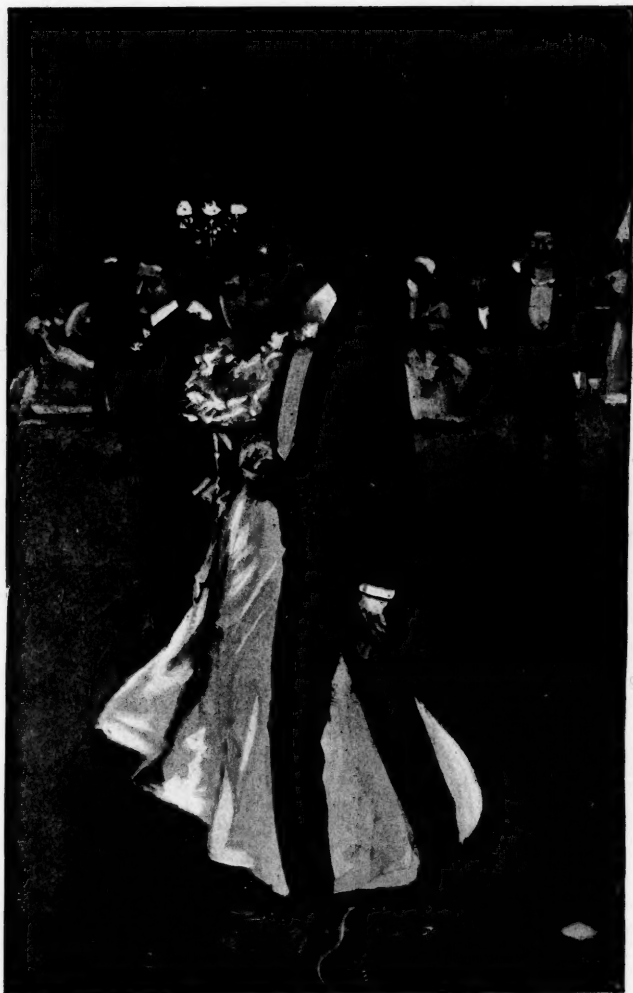
"Our dance, Miss Witherington," and she was carried off by a partner before Tom could say anything objectionable.

He looked after her doubtfully.

"What an unmitigated ass I was not to wire to Scotland-Yard."

Ten minutes passed, but there was no fresh arrival. The ball went on with growing excitement, as the pace waxed faster and





SHE PASSED TOM LEANING ON THE SWINDLER'S ARM.

APPEARANCES ARE AGAINST HIM.  
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the dancers' enthusiasm deepened, and faltering hopes brightened into confidence, and flirtations grew into something warmer, and the young rejoiced in their youth, and the middle-aged felt that they were young again. And all the while, though she danced so lightly and laughed so brightly, that old tragic and most hackneyed line kept ringing in Dolly's ears, "'He cometh not,' she said."

"No chance now," Tom remarked gloomily, as he pulled out his aggravating watch for the hundredth time.

"This train is always late; everybody says so," she answered, hoping against hope, though her heart was sinking fast as Captain Wigan carried her off for a last turn. And then, when the waltz was ended, as the final chords died softly into silence, he begged her to come into the garden out of the heat and the crowd, as he had often done before, but always in vain. There was nothing to wait for now, as she told herself despondently; and oh, she thought, what a talk there would be about it at breakfast; *his* character would be torn to shreds, and her faith in him held up to ridicule! Captain Wigan, sure of her attention at last, stooped and whispered a soft nothing in her ear, but he received no answer, for at the moment another voice said:

"May I take you into supper, Miss Witherington?" and there was Mr. Beauchamp, looking placid and unruffled as if he had been there all the evening.

She was so startled that she nearly screamed, and dropped Captain Wigan's arm as if it had burnt her, but excitement seemed ridiculous in face of his utter calmness; and she controlled herself with an effort.

"So you have come back," she said lamely.

"Yes, I've come back on purpose to talk to you," he said with the smile that lit up his face so wonderfully. "Can you spare me a few minutes?"

How radiant she looked as—Captain Wigan left stranded in the background quite forgotten—she passed Tom, leaning on the "swindler's" arm. It might have been the Prince of Wales himself, to judge by her overpoweringly triumphant expression, and her brother looked after her in puzzled surprise. Could that very gentlemanly fellow be the thief, the sharper, the scoundrel?

It was only the sight of his anxious face across the supper-table that made Dolly recollect her missing trunks after all; and

with a desperate effort she led the conversation back to that unforgettable journey from Munich. How ludicrous it was to accuse this man of stealing. The Archbishop of Canterbury could not look further above it; and the only way she could begin was to treat it as a joke.

"Why did you run away with both my boxes when you left me in the lurch at Victoria?" she asked, with a nervous laugh.

"Your boxes!" He dropped his fork and leant back in his chair, evidently trying to recall something from the furthest corner of his memory. "I got them out—" he said slowly.

"I know you did, but what did you do with them afterwards?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Good heavens, you don't mean to say that you never got them?" Certainly if his shocked surprise were feigned it was a perfect piece of acting.

"I never did."

"Then where are they?"

"That is precisely what I want to know."

#### CHAPTER IV.

FEW people were aware of the small drama which was being enacted at Lady Wigan's elaborately decorated supper-table. The boys were watching, with keenest curiosity, as Mr. Beauchamp leant back in his chair trying to recall every detail of his arrival in London on that day in June.

"A porter put your luggage on to a cab," he said slowly, "and 'pon my word, I believe I got into it, and drove off with it. What had become of you?"

"I had gone round to the other part of the station to take my ticket, and you were to bring me my luggage over there," Dolly said quietly.

"Instead of which I ran off with it. What *must* you have thought of me?" looking quite aghast.

"What have you done with it?" she asked, evading an answer to such an awkward question.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing."

This answer fell upon her with the force of a blow, and just as she was rallying from it, up came Lady Wigan, "What are you two plotting so mysteriously?"

"We are unravelling a mystery," Mr. Beauchamp said lightly.



"A Sherlock Holmes affair without the assistance of Conan Doyle."

"Then do be quick about it. You've only just come, and I *must* introduce you to Mrs. Ward, who——"

"Just one moment, Lady Wigan," entreated Dolly, as if her life depended on it.

"On condition that you tell me all about it another day," and with a mischievous nod, she retired.

The crowd in the room was thinning, but the boys were all there on the alert, and several others were watching the pair with some curiosity, for Miss Witherington was well known, and the companion who was engrossing her so entirely was an utter stranger.

"This is all that I can remember," Mr. Beauchamp said apologetically, as he met her earnest eyes. "As I stood by the office I saw a placard which announced that an Englishman had been arrested in Moscow, and I made up my mind at once that it was Niel, my brother. I am ashamed to say that I must have quite forgotten all about you. I drove at once to Wilton Crescent as fast as I could, and found several telegrams which confirmed my fears. Niel, as usual, had lost his passport and been arrested on suspicion. Of course, with the fear of Siberia or one of their wretched prisons before my mind, there was nothing for it but to start off at once, which I did, and I was only just in time, for he had a narrow shave of it. But as to your boxes, I never gave them a thought. If they ever came to my house I suppose they are there still. What *must* you have thought of me?" he repeated. "I feel inclined to grovel in the dust."

"I don't think I ever doubted you," Dolly said shyly.

"But the boys did," with a twinkle in his eye. "I can just imagine what they said of me—and your father too."

"Let us go back to the ball-room; Lady Wigan is waiting," and she rose hastily.

"Why didn't they send the police after me?"

"They did, but they couldn't find you," and she broke into an uncontrollable laugh.

"Ha, ha! And then as a climax, I ran away. You should have given me in charge when I appeared at the flower-show."

"Tom wanted to," she admitted.

"Ah, you must introduce me to Tom. By-the-bye, Niel's

telegram this afternoon must have put the finishing stroke," with an amused smile. "I must tell him to manage his scrapes more conveniently. Now we must fly to Lady Wigan."

The "boys'" animosity vanished into smoke as soon as they were brought into personal contact with the "sharper," and they humbly informed their father at breakfast the following morning that they had made a howling blunder. Mr. Beauchamp was A 1. Mr. Witherington replied with a barrister's natural caution, that he wanted solid proof in the shape of the missing property. This was supplied later in the day, when the two long-lost trunks arrived, locked, labelled and strapped, just as they were when their owner parted from them.

\*     \*     \*     \*

The following explanation was given by Mr. Beauchamp during one of his many visits to the Witheringtons' place at Leatherley. The trunks were deposited in the hall at Wilton Crescent by the cabman, and were found there by the butler after his master's hurried departure. After waiting in the hall for their owner to call for them, the housekeeper decided that they had better be carried up to the box-room, and there they had remained ever since. She had a long serious illness, and the butler a lengthy holiday, and by the time both were over, the servants had quite forgotten that two trunks belonging to a Miss Witherington were still lodged in the seclusion of the box-room; and there they might have remained if Dolly and Mr. Beauchamp had not met at Lady Wigan's ball.

"Niel is going to be married," Mr. Beauchamp remarked, as he walked up and down the Witheringtons' garden one charming day in September.

"I pity his wife," and Dolly smiled.

"Would you pity his sister-in-law?" Mr. Beauchamp asked quickly, as if he had a new idea in his head. The mere hint of the new idea covered Dolly's cheeks with blushes, but he quite forgot to broach it until he was outside the gate. He ran back. "I forgot," he panted; "will you be my wife?"

Report says, that he gained a bride and lost a train.

## The Casting of a Shoe.

By G. G. CHATTERTON.

OLIVER SUTTON was sick at heart ; yea, very sick at heart. Though he lay back in a comfortable chair, smoking an excellent cigar, and though the sun was shining in upon as snug a room as bachelor might desire, and though that sun shone from the season of spring, avowedly the hope-inspiring epoch of the whole year, he remained, as before observed, sick at heart. And yet, in addition to the afore-mentioned little material alleviations, Oliver Sutton was a well-looking, finely-framed man, the most casual glance at whom would acquaint you with the facts that he was possessed of youth and health, two goodly gifts, whilst a more searching inspection might impress upon you the idea that with one more excellent gift was he endowed—he had brains.

Scattered over the table nearest to his hand lay manuscript, into the paper of which had entered distinctly brain-matter from the part of the man who had written upon it. Essays showing culture and research added to the power to transmit the ideas upon their subjects ; lighter articles upon lighter questions of the day ; fiction for magazines, fanciful and charming, gracefully and as well cunningly penned ; story to catch and sustain the reader's interest, narrated without one superfluous or unnecessary word. As a triton, in size, amongst the minnows, a bulky roll proclaiming a novel in entirety—and yet, young, strong, clever and versatile, Oliver Sutton gazed upon them all, despondent and sick at heart.

For he could go on no more, he was deciding. He must chuck it all up. Time after time had he put forth his best and endeavoured to get that best recognized, and had failed ; and now he could try no longer, but must only at length go under. This morning's returned manuscript must be the last he would send out, and its accompanying printed form of stereotyped polite regrets from the publisher that it was not suited to his requirements, be the last that with deep and bitter oath he would fling, a crumpled ball, into his fire.

In the beginning he had been sanguine—groundlessly sanguine ; and confident—idiotically confident. Every human being who

ever had put pen to paper had gone through the same mill—why should not he? Some day he too would win his spurs! And he laid away his rejected MS. carefully, with vague notions as to yet publishing it—some bright day when his name would be known by better things, and had at once set to work to do the better things, not regretting that he had cast aside a steady-going, prosaic, but remunerative occupation for this brilliant myth of a literary career. As he possessed versatility as well as imagination, he varied his achievements accordingly, and he also supplemented them with an ally they do not always gain—the power of taking pains. Unsparingly he re-wrote and polished his articles and tales, till they sparkled with a style and a beauty that might well have extinguished one half the published contributions he saw appear triumphantly in pages where he had sought admittance and been denied. Delusively imagining that he would yet make use of these as pot-boilers, he wrote as well a novel; and the result of all was, that now he sat amongst them himself, finished and played out, his energy exhausted, his pen wiped, his money expended.

He had whimsically called this parade of his failures, had rooted them out from the recesses of his bureau and spread them forth upon the table, and——

"I say! what the deuce! Morning, Sutton. But, my dear fellow, what *is* the meaning of all this?" broke in a friend upon his meditations. "It's some relief to see you alive, anyhow," rattled on the new-comer, "for I hammered at your door so as to rouse the seven sleepers, without extracting a word in answer from you."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure, but I never heard you," Sutton apologized, jumping up to welcome his friend. "Sit down and light up—here," pushing over the box of cigars.

"Cigars! Inconsistency, thy name is Oliver! Two days ago, who was insisting upon the economy of a pipe?—the necessity for, and the all-sufficingness thereof!"

"Inconsistency needs no re-christening on my account. Two days are long enough to make all the difference in a man. For the future, I can as well afford cigars as pipes. You needn't look so astounded, Morley; the proper rendering is not so astounding, after all. I'm broke—that's all. Clean broke—stony broke—any other variety you may like to name—only broke, broke, broken all along the line."

"My dear chap! But it's not really so bad as that, is it?"

"Every bit. I have no money; I have no way of getting any money. I have been living on my capital; my capital has come to an end. I have just paid up my rent, and have left a fiver and a little loose silver in my pocket. When that has come to an end—well, I suppose I must only come to an end also!"

"Oh, stop, for God's sake—don't talk like that!" exclaimed the other; "it's bad, and unlucky in every way. It's like invoking the devil, and I'm awfully superstitious."

"I'm not the least," rejoined Sutton with a hard laugh. "Though once I was—always avoided walking under ladders or spilling salt, or breaking glasses, or running against any of the rubbishy observances—and much good it has done me! No, there's no atom of superstition left about me. I'd just as soon——"

"Shut up, will you, and tell me instead what really is wrong with you—what it is that has happened?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, only all things in general. Fact is, I have for some time been living on hope alone, and hope alone is an unsubstantial bank, and by degrees my balance has dwindled and run out, until—well, I have just declared to you my assets, and 'I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed'—it's come to a case of that."

"Poor old chap, I am so awfully sorry for you—awfully, upon my soul. And all the writing?" with a glance at the freighted table.

"Will do to light the fires with—only, I forgot, I shan't be able to pay for any fires to light."

"Surely something—something could be done."

"Don't know what," and Sutton shook his head gloomily. "I have thought about it—vaguely—over and over again before this. It's no bolt from the blue to me, you see. It's been impending long enough, God knows; only each bid that I made for success, I thought that it might come."

"Tell you what," Morley resumed, after a pause devoted to cigar consumption only, "we might consult old Parkinson, if you wouldn't mind letting him into your confidence. He's such an awfully good chap, you know, and so awfully full of resource and all that kind of thing, and we'll see him to-morrow—I mean, what I dropped in about was to ask you will you come with us to-morrow to Kempton Park races?"

"Don't feel much like it—don't feel as if I'd care to."

"All the more reason to come. Try and get rid of the cobwebs for a few hours. Come, and then afterwards dine with me, and I'll have old Parkinson as well, and we'll consult him, and something may turn up. By Jove! I keep thinking something will! Do you know, I have a kind of feeling that it will."

And so Oliver Sutton was persuaded, and without feeling especially attuned to the outing, spent some of his remaining silver in accompanying his friends to the races the day following.

They formed a jolly party. All allusions to Sutton's untoward affairs lay strictly in abeyance until after dinner, and soon he became himself temporarily oblivious of them and entered with strange—doubtless reckless—lightheartedness into the spirits of the day.

In the paddock a horse attracted him, a thoroughbred chestnut of a light bright colour that gleamed like gold in the sun, with a backward-rolling eye, showing its white, that bespoke the temper often accompanying such a colour, and explained the circle suggestively cleared for him and his groom leading him. Sutton looked at the horse—looked again at him.

"Morley!" he exclaimed with a sudden uncontrollable impulse, "see that chestnut over there! I am going to back him."

"Back that chestnut!" Morley was, not unnaturally, surprised. Sutton was not a betting man—his disclosures of yesterday—this sudden decision on a horse he knew nothing whatever about. "But, my dear fellow——"

"I know—I know all you are going to say," Sutton interrupted him impatiently. "I have no money—the horse is unknown to us—and all that. But I am going to back him all the same. Why, I can't tell you. I'll see how far my remaining fiver will go. I tell you, Morley," with an awkward, semi-apologetic laugh, "something—I don't know what—seems impelling me."

"Yesterday, you told me you had finished with superstitions. It's an untrustworthy looking brute that you've picked out. At any rate, come first round to the ring and hear how things are going."

Things in the ring were not encouraging, but Sutton's mind, decided previously, remained doggedly the same. Five to one was freely offered and accepted against Jeroboam, the chestnut. He was a doubtful horse, uncertain, of a temper you could never count upon. All the same, upon Jeroboam did Oliver Sutton stake the last five pounds that remained to him in the world.



His race was about starting now. The clamour in the ring had reached its zenith. Above the buzzing murmur of the bettors the hoarse yelling of the bookies rose deafening. Sutton, strangely excited for a man who heretofore cared little about horses or mixing himself up with them, went off to take up a position near a hurdle towards the finish of the course.

On swept the horses, nine in all, their glossy coats and the fluttering silk of the jockeys' shirts shimmering in the sun—so close together that you could have covered them with a sheet. A pretty race. A furze bank first, and all safe over it; then some little straggling. Next, a water jump—a splash and the ducking of a jockey; more straggling. Now the horses ran three abreast, then two, the remaining four following separately, one behind the other—and third of these ran Jeroboam.

Black, bay, brown, chestnut—green, crimson, blue, pink, yellow—every colour shining—on they raced closer to Sutton and the hurdle he stood near; Jeroboam going easily, with grand, swinging stride and perfect equanimity of temper. Creeping up—now heading the four stragglers—level now with the two preceding them—neck and neck with the three leaders—and the hurdle before them all.

Sutton's breath came thick and fast. He stood, filled with an extraordinary excitement, watching the race as never before had he watched one, when suddenly something flashed against the sunlight streaming in his eyes. The chestnut had cast a shoe, and straight across at Sutton it shot, striking him smartly near the temple. Twisting from it, his foot caught in a hole and he fell heavily to the ground, whilst a minute later arose a hoarse yell as Jeroboam was proclaimed winner, the outsider having beaten the favourite easily by a neck.

The thoroughbred chestnut was paraded to his admirers in the paddock; the bookies busied themselves about the next race coming on; the band brayed out; the crowd laughed and chatted; and Oliver Sutton lay senseless with the blood trickling slowly from a gash across his brow.

When he recovered consciousness he was rolling along in a carriage, his legs flat upon a stretcher. Opposite him, beside where were his feet, sat his friend Morley; next to himself, an unknown man.

"Ah, that's right!" the latter exclaimed cheerily, "and now

keep quite quiet, and we'll tell you all about it, because you must not excite yourself, and to remain wondering and impatient to know is exciting.) Here you are, you see, comfortably on your way to town with me, Doctor Harris, and your friend Major Morley. The wound on your head is nothing, I am happy to say, a mere nothing, though close enough to the temple to have produced unconsciousness. That and the shock from the suddenness of the entire affair—breaking in too, upon, no doubt, a previous condition of excitement—and the sharp pain from the fracture of your ankle-bone, which, I regret to say, was the result of your fall. However, it was a clean break, no nasty complications whatever, and, luckily too, no time lost about setting it, and so, on the whole, we may be quite comfortable and sanguine—entirely sanguine as to the consequences."

Having digested this information with closed eyes, Sutton next opened them interrogatively upon his friend. He was feeling more inclined to hearing words than uttering them.

"Some lady lent you this carriage, old chap," Morley supplied as further intelligence; "put it promptly at your service and said she'd get back herself by train. It was much better bringing you up at once than leaving you anywhere down there, and we're going straight on to St. George's Hospital, where Doctor Harris is a surgeon, and where in a pay ward you'll be far more comfortable than you would be anywhere else. Jeroboam won after all," he added, "to the surprise of the whole course."

"You don't say so!"

"He did—after flinging his shoe in your face. And see, here it is, for when I arrived upon the scene and heard them all talking about it, I picked it up and kept it for you, as I *am* superstitious! And may it bring you luck!"

Sutton smiled faintly and with incredulity. Doctor Harris suggested that there had been a sufficiency of conversation, and no further interchange of words took place until when Morley, having seen his friend comfortable for the night, was taking leave of him.

"I say," Sutton remarked to him, "it was well that Jeroboam did win. It will clear some of the expenses of this confounded affair, eh?"

"Oh, that will be all right," Morley reassured him; "don't worry, old man. Good-bye for the present. See you again to-

morrow, and we'll make the nurse hang Jeroboam's shoe up over your bed."

Nurse Lewis, under whose charge Sutton was placed, was skilful and kind, and he liked her much, and felt too that he owed to her gratitude for all the care and attention she expended on him—but still, better again did he like another nurse who daily, for a time, took her place and visited him. This nurse did nothing material for him beyond turning and re-arranging his cushions or handing him a glass of water, and yet she it was whom greatly he preferred, and soon found himself looking forward to these slight ministrations on her part with an anticipation that surprised him.

Her presence, too, was so very agreeable to him, for that she was a lady, and as well one of a superior type, was evident at once to him, and the very things that she was the means of bringing with her to him encompassed her personality with an attraction eminently alluring to his refined, fastidious, artistic temperament. Grapes with the rich purple bloom on them, peaches with their soft crimson down, rare flowers of exquisite colours and fresh scents—these from her very first visit the day after his arrival in the hospital did she always carry into his little ward.

"The lady sent them by me," she explained; "the lady in whose carriage you travelled up here. She witnessed your whole accident, and takes the greatest interest in you."

"Really! How awfully good of her," Sutton gratefully replied. "Fancy sending me all these. She must be a rich lady as well as a kind one— isn't she?"

"Oh, yes; she is a rich lady."

"Well to be her," he commented lightly. "And what is her name? Do you know her?"

"Yes, I know her very well. Her name is Stafford."

"Well, I'm sure I hope that you thank this—which is she? Mrs. or Miss or Lady Stafford? Oh, *Miss!* Really!—most heartily for all her great kindness to me, and tell her, please, that as soon as ever I can crawl I hope to go and try to thank her myself in person."

"Would you like me to ask Miss Stafford if she would come here and see you?" suggested Nurse Robinson one day when he had been enjoining upon her transmission of his gratitude; "then you could tell her all this yourself."

"N—no—I think not."

"Why? You are quite tidy and fit to receive her—shaved and all—not like some invalids, you know."

"Oh, yes—it's not that. But I have a feeling as if I don't much want to see her just now, all the same. Indeed, not from ingratitude—for I am most grateful to her—but still . . . Besides, it would only bore her coming here to me."

"But that's an afterthought," accused Nurse Robinson archly. "Your first was your reason."

"I suppose it was," he admitted with a laugh. "After all, no reason—no real reason. Only a feeling."

"You shouldn't always give way to your feelings," she told him sagely.

"The more especially after the predicament in which obeying them has lately landed me, eh?"—he had told her the whole story about his backing the chestnut—"but which sometimes doesn't seem so bad! If only there were no future to be considered!" And he finished with a sigh and sudden clouding over of his spirits.

They grew great friends, with that species of tender friendship which creeps in between a man and a woman. Once she confided to him that of all labours she considered hospital nursing the most repelling. To have to earn her bread had been a come-down to her, he concluded. What sadness this world holds for all of us!

"And have you been long at it?" he inquired.

"Oh, no! quite a short, short time. I really know very little as yet about the duties."

"Horrible duties, I fear, many of them."

"And only such small pay, too," she sighed. "The world is very hard for a woman struggling to earn a living."

"The same, I assure you, for a man." And both sighed in concert.

"Persons born with that silver spoon stuck inside their mouths are lucky, aren't they, however inconvenient it may sound to us outsiders?" he resumed. "That happy, rich Miss Stafford for example—she can't have a thing to worry about, eh?"

"Not much, indeed; but perhaps it may be all before her."

"A cheerful forecast for Miss Stafford!" he laughed; "but we must hope not. Remember how good she has been—"

how good she is, indeed, to me. I must regard her as a kind of patroness."

"Patronesses are horrors—always."

"Horrors," he agreed.

"I could repeat!" she warned him. "Tell upon you to Miss Stafford. I know her very well indeed."

"No, you couldn't."

"Why?"

"Because you couldn't possibly do anything that was not entirely nice, and kind, and honourable."

It was all very charming and attractive, and pleasure-giving, for, as very soon he right well knew, he had fallen deeply in love with her. Knew, and was not surprised—the sweetest, prettiest, bonniest little beguiler that ever hovered over an invalid's couch.

She was attired in precise similarity with his head nurse: the same cap and apron and washing cotton dress—but oh, the difference! On her it appeared alluring beyond the most insidious of Parisian fashions, and to watch her flitting about in it, arranging the flowers she brought from his wealthy "patroness," was sufficient to have made Worth himself swear for ever by the costume.

"Nothing but roses to-day," she observed, "because you said they were your favourite flowers, and I told Miss Stafford. You see, I can repeat some of your sentiments!"

She dispensed around fragrant glories in pinks and yellows and crimsons, deftly dropping a bunch of golden-hued, tea-scented, dewy-leaved blossoms by his elbow on his couch.

"How nice of you—and how good of her to mind. I don't know how ever I am to thank her properly when the moment comes."

"Doubtless with the moment will come the proper thanks."

"It is to be hoped so, indeed. It's so curious that I am beset by this idea that I shan't like her, and though the gratitude may all the same be there, it is so hard to express nice gratitude to a person you don't much like."

"Extremely hard," she agreed, and laughed and laughed—for Nurse Robinson was essentially a young person of a mirthful mind—over the prophetic obnoxiousness of poor Miss Stafford. And Sutton joined her, laughing merrily too, as he sniffed the lovely roses that lady had sent him.

It was all so charming and ensnaring up to a certain date, and then it grew sad—and sadder, with an increasing sadness. Sutton now loved Nurse Robinson desperately. All the poetic fancy and all the manly strength of his nature had gone out to her, and oh, how he loved her! and what could he hope to ever be to her? Out of the hospital he must go, broken now alike in heart and fortune—everything had failed him and crumbled beneath his touch. Talent and love had alike betrayed him, and the few hours of joy the present had granted him would serve but to render the future blacker again. The sum of money he had won would not cover the expenses of all that the means of winning it had brought in their train—cursed fate that had led him to those races that day—that had turned his eyes to light upon that horse and prompted him to back him.

This was his reward for obeying some occult instinct! Idiot—fool! He raised his hand and dashed the shoe with sudden wrath from over his couch, and as it fell ringing on the floor, came at his door that light knock he knew and loved so well.

"But what is this?" exclaimed Nurse Robinson. "The horse-shoe! Oh, Mr. Sutton, what have you done? Thrown down Jeroboam's shoe—and your luck—your luck—think of it! Your good fortune." She picked it up hastily, and was advancing to replace it, but he waved her back.

"No, no, I will have none of it! I wish that I had never seen it—felt it, rather," with a grim laugh. "Superstitions with me should be reversed—harm it has brought to me—not good."

"Oh, don't say that—please don't say that," she pleaded softly, and there was a dewy mistiness in her eyes as she again approached. "Do not abuse it. Besides, it is unlucky; and let me hang it here again."

"If you will," he gloomily acquiesced. "After all, it doesn't signify. What difference can it make?"

"It can make a difference," she persisted, and hung it up, and then sat down beside him, looking very simple in her nurse's cotton dress and apron. "And why," she asked, pushing a hand in and out of its pocket, "have I found you quarrelling with Jeroboam's shoe? Because it brought this accident upon you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that, of course, was very hard—very painful for you to bear—and altogether very hard upon you. And I have been so



very, very sorry for you. Still—" she gave a little sigh, she slid her hand in and out of her apron pocket, she looked up at him and then down at it, and then very softly she uttered, "still—I—like—Jeroboam's shoe."

"You—like—Jeroboam's shoe?"

"I do."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Yes, if you will tell me why you flung it on the floor just now."

"I am afraid I can't."

"Then, I can't either."

And then there came a silence. Neither added a word. He stared at her and she stared away from him behind his head at Jeroboam's shoe.

"It does seem rather a pity," she broke it by observing, "that we should have come to loggerheads to-day after having always got on so well before—just now, when to-morrow you will be getting your crutches and then be going right away from all of us."

"Loggerheads! Loggerheads!" he repeated vehemently.

"Yes, it's an ugly little word," she sweetly said; "an ugly and a vulgar little word, but really——"

"Oh, can't you see?" he cried, for his pain and passion were strong, and she to him seemed trifling. "Can't you guess? Can't you know or feel?"—and he burst forth and told her it all—the old old ever-new, never-new story, repeated over so often, whether in accents of triumph or of despair. In the latter was his, alas, perforce couched, but she, listening, seemed all joy.

What did it matter, she would fatuously keep repeating; what did any other consideration the least signify, so long as he loved her—really and truly did love her in the teeth of all untowardness, for herself, and herself alone.

"Even if I am only a poor hospital nurse, and you, as you say, are beggared and ruined and without a penny in your pocket."

It seemed very hard to have to dash her happiness by drowning it in the cold waters of common sense; more than he could do indeed—impossible—for with such a witching pertinacity she defeated and defied his conscientious attempts. And so she made him, too, thrust aside the misfortune of it recklessly for the present, and snatch this their hour of joy.

It seemed scant enough. As he had to let her go from him, his

heart sank heavy as lead. . . . And the next morning came his crutches for him . . . . he was to leave the hospital cured . . . . leave it and its story behind him . . . . and oh, the parting that lay in store for him in it in the afternoon.

"Miss Stafford says she would so much like to see you before you leave this," Nurse Lewis informed him, "and she is here now, waiting to come in if you will receive her."

Miss Stafford—and he had temporarily forgotten that the world contained such a being. More than ever, ingrate that he was, did he in this moment feel disinclined to meet her, but——. "Of course; yes, certainly. Show Miss Stafford in, please," was his reply.

He was in no mood for any stranger. How his words belied his heart—and then it gave a bound, as suddenly shot across him a wild, impossible idea. Mabel had said she knew her well. Could the visit be in any way connected with her? Could she have something to say about her?

Nurse Lewis threw open his door. "Miss Stafford," she announced, and as she admitted that lady a long ray of sunlight slanted in at the open door, gleaming against Sutton's expectant eyes.

There came a great *frou-frou* of silk—a flutter of lace and airy drapery floated in upon the sunbeam—the plumy feathers of a large picture hat, and beneath its brim sparkled before his blinking sight the archly pretty, piquante face of—Nurse Robinson.

Oliver Sutton said nothing, for the simple reason that he was suddenly deprived of the power of speech.

"I am Miss Stafford," she informed him gravely enough. Then flinging herself impetuously against him, "I am—I am—I am," she joyously proclaimed; "and you would have married poor Nurse Robinson had it only been the least bit possible—and I fell in love at sight with you at those races in the paddock—and I overheard every word that you spoke to Major Morley—and I made Nurse Lewis lend me her clothes and keep my secret—and I came here because I felt that I loved you when they were laying you in the carriage to bring you here—and the carriage was mine, and the flowers mine—only I wanted to test you, and I have tested you—so now you are mine, too—and I am the happiest girl in the whole entire wide world—only a little uncomfortably out of breath at present . . . . and oh, Oliver, I might have become about the very most miserable!"

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